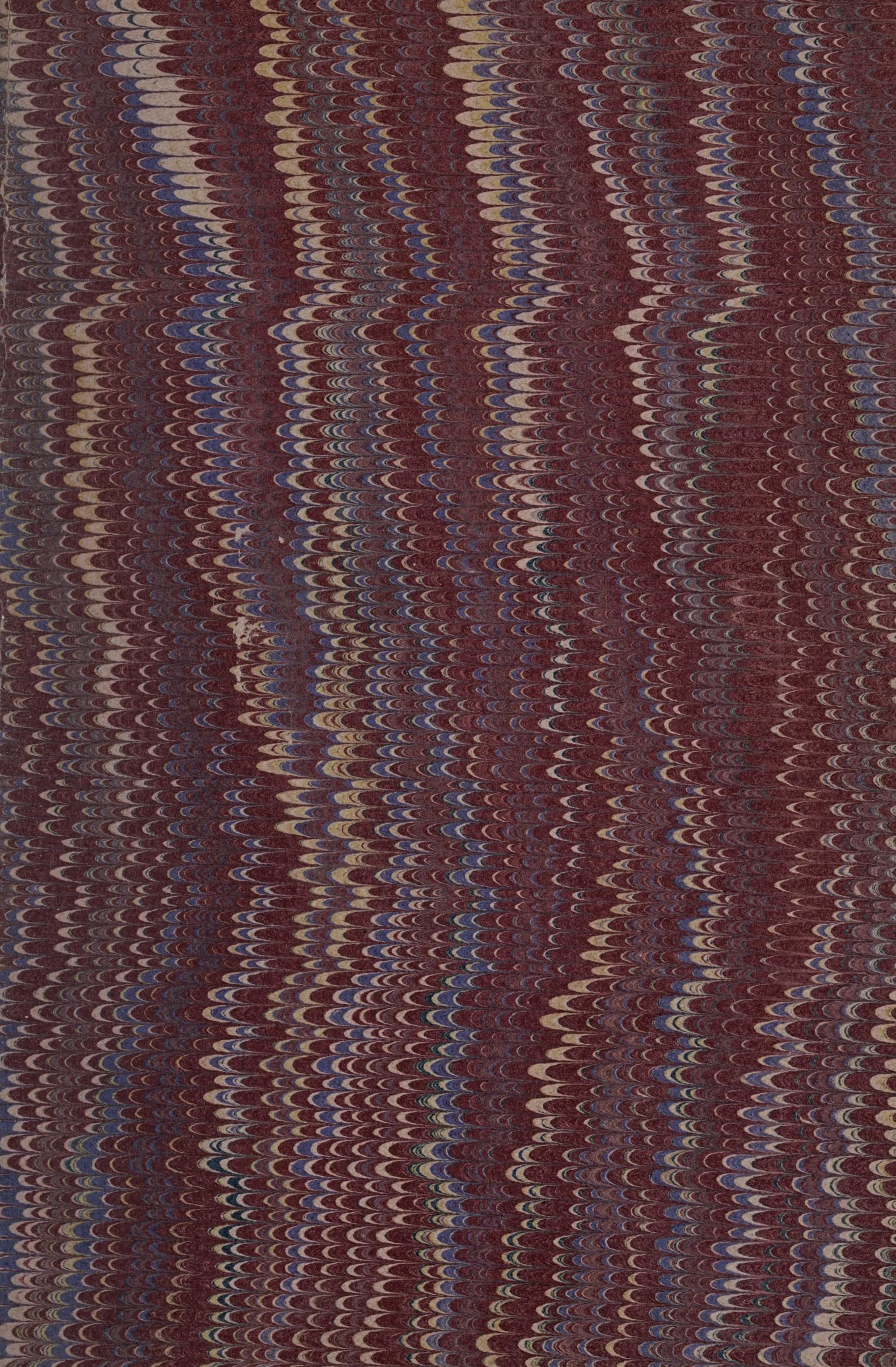


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CLAUDEA'S ISLAND

BY

ESMÈ STUART

AUTHOR OF "VIRGINIE'S HUSBAND," "JOAN VELLACOT,"
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TO MRS. EVELYN HEATHCOTE.

WILL you, a Poet-Artist, accept this story of
"Claudea's Island," offered with truest
admiration?

My words have but imperfectly described that
which your brush has expressed far more poetically;
yet from Nature we both draw our inspiration because
we both love her with humble devotion.

ESMÈ STUART.





CLAUDEA'S ISLAND.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE MAINLAND.

“When life was like a story holding neither sob nor sigh,
In the golden olden glory of the days gone by.”

Course she had been christened *Claudia*, and when she signed her letters she wrote it in this approved fashion, but neither she, nor anyone else at St. Castell, ever pronounced the name in the usual manner. It was always *Claudēa*, and who in the small sea-girt town needed any further personal description? Claudea was the daughter of the landlord of the “Mermaid.” He owned this inn and a good many acres which lay round about the building; and further, he owned the “Nun,” the long rock-fringed island on which was built a picturesque farmhouse. It was the only homestead in all the island, if we except the thousands of sea-bird nurseries, narrow ledges on the face of the high rocks which rose, dark and frowning to

the north and east of the lonely land. In some seasons of the year these wild birds would join in a chorus of clamour which at times rivalled the roar of the ocean. Claudea would often stand on the edge of the cliff and look down the giddy depth covered by the screaming and fluttering gulls, puffins, razorbills, and other wild sea-fowl. The sight and sound fascinated her, and many inexpressible feelings would strive for expression in thought as the wind lightly lifted her stray curling locks at the bidding of some unseen power.

It had taken many ages to form these great rocks now swarming with agitated life, and ages, too, to form that humanity which found its expression in Claudea Dewis with her beauty, her aspiration, and her mobility. When we think of it, there is more to wonder at in the existence of a finite imperfect human being than in a perfect and immortal angel.

Claudea had so much life in her. She seemed composed of the elements of winds and waves, of sea-foam and fine glittering sand, of delicate bivalve shells and of the hard crustacea. At times, too, her soul seemed too big for her lithe body ; she felt she must have motion, and then she would call David Neeld from the farm work, and with this deaf and dumb companion she would run down to Porth Caerog, and between them they would launch the "Sea-gull" and sail merrily over to the island. No fisherman understood how to sail a small boat better than did Claudea, for had she not begun as a baby to

handle oars and sails, when her father, Martin Dewis, had his home on the island, and only came over to St. Castell two or three times a week on important business or to buy needful provisions? Not long ago, however, the "Mermaid" at St. Castell was put up for sale; Martin Dewis bid for it, and became the landlord and owner of the inn and the farm attached to it. He and his wife, Madge, were rather wearying of the lonely island and of the sea journey that divided them from the mainland. Their old bones craved for easier paths and less abundance of sea water, so Silvester, their younger son, was left at the "Nun" to work that farm and to see after the labourers, whilst the rest of the family migrated to the mainland.

"'Tis Claudea who will break her heart," said Martin, when the move was decided upon, "but look, my lass, I'm a rich man, and my daughter can wed whom she likes. Silvester and mother, you can be witnesses that the 'Nun' shall belong to Claudea on her wedding day, for she knows every foot of the island, and there's no one but her and Dumb Davy that has gone from St. Castell to the island backward and forward more often, that is, considering her length of days."

Claudea smiled her joy.

"Then I'll go with you, father, if so be I may call the island my own some day; but as to marrying, there's time enough for that when the right man comes my way."

"Ay, ay, time enough, lass ; it's not your father that wishes you gone, and Silvester shall keep the farm warm till you come back. 'Tis a lonesome place, and if so be mother falls sick, it worries me to keep watching the wind and waves to see if the doctor can cross over. We have worked hard, and it's time we laid in the furrow a bit."

"Dumb Davy can manage the 'Sea-gull' better than any lad at St. Castell, father," said Claudea, "and if I may have him now and again when the island sickness takes me, I'll not mind St. Castell so much."

"I wager you'll soon be forgetting the island, girl, when you begin to gossip round St. Castell ; but, there ! you shall have Dumb Davy when you like, and Silvester 'll be mighty pleased to see you when you come over."

"You weren't born on the island, father," said Claudea, laughing a little ; "you don't know what the sickness is, nor does mother, and she isn't from these parts even. No, I'll never get over loving the island ; it's in my blood, I feel it. When the 'Sea-gull' sails nearer and nearer the shore there comes a bounding feeling in my heart, and when I hear the keel grate on the pebbles I feel as if I had all I wanted."

"Wait till the lover comes by," said Martin, "there'll be another kind of home-sickness then, I reckon ; but the island shall be yours, Claudea, when you wed—it's your father as says it."

Martin knew that when he said this he should feel Claudea's arms round his neck and her sweet lips on his old furrowed cheeks. He would have given her more than the island, had it been necessary, to make sure she loved him.

"Father spoils the girl," thought Mrs. Dewis, as she looked at the two with her kind motherly eyes ; "he is just silly about her. When I was a girl my father never thought of my willing and nilling. It was sharp words and plenty of work ; but there, we were five girls, and father has but this one. Morgan and Silvester don't find such favour as does Claudea. Well, I don't grudge the girl her joy, but God sends us more often sorrow than pleasure, and them as seem most favoured have sometimes to pass through a rough sea in order to get to the shore."

"Come, mother, don't you be shaking your head," said Martin, as Claudea ran away. "The girl isn't like any other girl I know of. She is the prettiest and sweetest lass at St. Castell, though I says it, and it will go hard with the man that isn't kind to my daughter."

"She's pretty, and as she's yours, Martin, I doubt not but that you'll think there's no one as can come up to her, but she has queer ways for all that. She's very different to what I was when I was a girl. She's had her liberty too much, and that's a bad thing when a girl has a heart. Claudea takes things too earnest-like."

"One would say you didn't like her to be happy, mother. Come, now, when we're settled in at the

'Mermaid' she'll see more than enough folks, and her quaint ideas 'll melt like snow. I wish Morgan took more after his sister. What with his sour looks and his short ways I don't see how he's to get on in life. Now Silvester's more like Claudea. I would rather have left Morgan on the island, but he don't get on with the men. They can't stomach his sharp words at all."

"Morgan's never been favoured by you, father," answered the kind woman. She had often to defend Morgan in spite of knowing full well he was in the wrong, and that his temper was always cross-grained. Another difficulty about him was that he was jealous of Claudea, and never would give in to her fancies as did everyone else in the house; but it was Martin, and not his daughter, who resented it.

Now the change had really been effected. The inn had been freshly painted, papered, and repaired. The old sign of the "Mermaid" had been made more wonderful, mythological, and fascinating by new scales and new fins in green and gold. Her hair was painted of a startling auburn colour, strangely like scarlet, and when the renovated sign swung backward and forward in a high wind, no more pressing welcome was needed to lure both man and beast into the hospitable shelter of Martin Dewis' guest-room.

* * * * *

It was Christmas Eve. The old town of St. Castell was astir, and all the inhabitants were making active preparations for the Eve service. Chapel-goers and

church-people were of one mind, on this evening at least, in the belief that it was fitting to go to some form of worship in order to do honour to the birthday of the Christ.

The town consisted of a few quaint streets. Two of them climbing up short steep hills, and the others lying on the flat ground above, looking down upon their neighbours and upon the ancient church, to which had once been attached famous monastic buildings, adding life to what was now only a depopulated big village. The glory of the past was written in large letters on the beautiful carvings of endless diversity that enriched the nave and chancel of the grey church, and the decay of old ideas was also inscribed on the partly ruined transepts, where starlings now congregated at even, and wind-driven sea-gulls quietly contemplated the desolation. Close by were grander and more extensive ruins of an ancient palace, in whose grass-grown enclosure Martin Dewis' cows came to graze, and rare tourists stood to speculate.

The service in the old church was to be held at eight o'clock, and Mrs. Dewis, having prepared a supper to be partaken of after the return home, was thinking of going upstairs to put on her bonnet and shawl, when she heard her husband's voice calling to her from the old-fashioned guest-room, situated behind the large parlour, and now brilliantly illuminated by a roaring fire.

“Mother! Where is Claudea? I’m wanting her to

come to the service with me. There's carols to be sung to-night, and Heaven knows what else! Mr. Tramerin, the new curate, is to discourse, and they say Methody Smallbrooke is nothing to him."

"It's pretty certain Claudea's gone to Porth Caerog this evening. She said something about wanting a sight of the island. The girl is getting daft about the old place."

"Nay, nay, Claudea is true to old friends, mother, but I reckon the lass will meet us at the door. Morgan will stay at home in case a traveller arrives to-night. He's not the man to care for singing o' carols," and old Dewis laughed till his whole jolly frame shook with delight at the idea of his sour son Morgan appreciating the beauties of melody.

Mrs. Dewis' guess had been a correct one. It was a beautiful winter's evening; indeed, it was almost warm, as is sometimes the case near the southern sea-coast. A bright moon threw quivering beams upon the wavelets and upon the surrounding dark rocks, while, from Porth Caerog, the "Nun" and other smaller islands dotted about in the distance formed a scene of indescribable beauty. Close by the life-boat house on the shore was a small rude shed where Dewis kept his "Sea-gull," and a little way up on the cliff was the lonely cottage where lived Dumb Davy and his mother, and here the Dewis family kept their keys and their fishing tackle, paying the widow and her son a welcome yearly sum to keep everything clean and in order.

Claudea could not resist the temptation of running down on this first Christmas Eve to the Porth, from which place she knew she could get the best view of the island bathed in exquisite moonlight. At this moment, soon after six o'clock, she was sitting on the edge of the "Sea-gull," for she had opened the boat-house door so as to shelter herself from the evening breeze, and with her chin on her hands she gazed out upon the distant scene. From its present appearance it might have been a fairyland of unreal dreams, and yet it was all as true as it was beautiful, and Claudea knew it. The huge rocky cliffs at the eastern extremity of the "Nun" looked double their true height, now that this silvery haze enveloped them. The circling bay where she stood made the distance seem to be wider and more mysterious, and the smaller rocks and islands all appeared to be handmaidens to the "Nun" which lay stretched upon the water, looking in her greater proportion like an amazon among dainty fairies.

"In three-quarters of an hour, or maybe half an hour, for the wind is rising, I could take you over there, dear Sea-gull. Dumb Davy's only sitting over the fire. I declare I will go. We could be back before supper-time. I'm longing for a tramp across the island, and I want to look in upon Silvester. How he would laugh to see me appear! Shall I go? Maybe father would be sorry to miss me at church, but the longing is dreadful." She crossed her arms and pressed her shapely brown hands tightly against

her bosom as she went on meditating. "Folks who are born in islands don't seem to thrive where there's not water all round them. I know the wild birds must just be missing me. Anyhow I'm just missing them, and I feel sure Silvester's never put up any holly or mistletoe in the old rooms. He forgot to get any yesterday, and the words stuck in my throat when I was about to remind him. Shall I go?"

She stretched herself backward and seized a bunch of holly and mistletoe which she had hidden at the bottom of the "Sea-gull." At that moment there was a rattle of pebbles close beside the tiny path leading from the cliff, and Claudea jumped up to find that it was Dumb Davy who stood close beside her.

These two only used signs, but their sign-language was wonderfully rich and extensive, and quite beyond the understanding of ordinary mortals.

"There's someone coming down here," said Davy in his sign-language.

"Who is it?" said Claudea, in the same silent vocabulary.

"It's Teilo Price," replied Dumb Davy.

Then Claudea laughed. Teilo was such an old acquaintance he could understand her longing. But suppose he came over too? Well, no—perhaps her mother wouldn't like it, though why she should mind what Teilo did was quite beyond Claudea's understanding.

In another moment Teilo himself stood beside her. He was the son of the miller at St. Castell, a man of

even greater importance to the community than Claudea's father. The two had known each other from childhood, and Claudea was not afraid of any remark Teilo might make at seeing her here at this moment.

"I want to go over home, Teilo," she said half laughing, but the laugh ended in a little sigh.

"Do you? Well, what's to hinder? I'll soon rig up the sail, and here's Dumb Davy your obedient slave as usual. Come along, Claudea."

For one moment Claudea wanted to say "yes," then something stopped her.

"No, Teilo, I mustn't. Father 'll be put about if I don't go to the Eve service with him, but I did sorely want to get home. Let's come to-morrow. Mother's sure to be wanting to know if Silvester is lucky with White-ear, and whether the pretty creature's got over her trouble—I fancy she'll be breaking her heart for us, poor thing."

Teilo stood beside the boat on which Claudea had reseated herself, and furtively looked at the girl who made such a charming picture in the moonlight. He himself was tall, broad-shouldered, of a reddish-brown complexion, with dark brown hair, but a smooth, shaven face. He was not exactly handsome, except so far as a good figure and good bearing can make a man handsome, but there was a determined eager look in his eyes showing that he was a man accustomed to command others and to expect from them prompt obedience. His look also spoke very plainly

of admiration for his companion, but Claudea was quite unconscious of it. Dumb Davy, however, with his slouching figure, his head, as it seemed, over-weighted on one side, his ugly face, but intelligent eyes, noted the look, for not many outward things escaped the notice of the, as some deemed, much afflicted boy.

"There are few that would not miss you, Claudea. I am glad you have now come to settle at St. Castell. Sezerina is mighty glad that you are living so near to the mill. She is but a poor sailor; you know she didn't like crossing over to the island; she was always afraid."

"Fancy being afraid of the water!" said Claudea, laughing. "Oh, I love it! I like to feel it lapping over my hands, and I like to watch it curling over into big waves. Teilo, I should die if I had to live right away inland."

"I suppose you never will have to live inland. I hear your father says he means to give you the island when you marry."

"Father did say so. Well, I must hurry back. Are you coming, Teilo?"

"Yes, I'm coming. There's a service in our chapel to-night."

The two started up the narrow cliff path in silence; then Claudea remarked, just looking back to see if Dumb Davy were following:

"I don't know how you can keep to chapel-going, Teilo. Father says the Dewises of Nun's Island have

been church-folk for a long time—hundreds of years. Father doesn't like the chapel-people."

"No, I know he doesn't. He doesn't like me."

"Oh, you, Teilo; you're just like a brother—I must go and tell Davy to put away the keys, for I mustn't go over this evening."

"Wait, Claudea. You'll let me come back with you, won't you?" said Teilo earnestly, almost severely.

"Why not? I meant you to come. Wait here, I won't be long; so don't be impatient." Thus saying, Claudea disappeared into the cottage, and the young man, leaning against a gatepost, gazed thoughtfully at the in-coming of the cold moonlit waves and at the misty silvery islands over which the stars twinkled on this wondrous Christmas eve.





CHAPTER II.

A CHRISTMAS EVE WALK.

“Let what I praise be still made good by you :
Be you most worthy, whilst I am most true.”

HE road from Porth Caerog to St. Castell's is always lonely. There are no sheltering trees on this promontory, but only fair-sized hedges, or banks with broad, flat tops, on which little paths are trodden by the inhabitants, thus providing them with a second series of beaten ways above the narrow lanes that intersect the country in every direction. The general flatness is, however, relieved by several ridges of rocky hills, rising almost suddenly and precipitously from the plain, and of such wonderful outlines as to have the appearance of a miniature range of volcanic mountains. Every now and again a tiny white cottage nestles at the foot of these crags, or shelters itself close to the broad back of a hedge. The country is but poorly peopled, and the occasional villages, composed of a smithy, a few cottages, a very modest chapel, and usually a small farm just off the main road, only add to the loneliness of the surrounding

land. But if there are few hills, there are many little streams and rivulets. Some have deeply furrowed their own beds, and thus formed quite respectable depressions as they gurgle on to the sea, the delight of birds, plants, and wandering cattle. But all round St. Castell and its two coasts you are within sound and sight of the wonderful sea. At the edge of this coast for miles you can walk by the side of the steep cliffs, which are so diversified in shape and colour as to cause continual surprise as you wind in and out, following the big path worn by the feet of labourers and of fishermen. This path, parallel with the sinuous line of the cliff, is at times so close to the edge as to make nervous persons choose in preference the more elevated way on the top of the bank.

St. Castell had been built as it were on the base-line of a triangle, the point or apex being known as St. Castell's Head. This head, looking like a dark sea-serpent in the act of gliding down from some high tableland, is visible all round the coast, and can also be seen from many of the surrounding little bays or porths. The peasants know well its various weather moods, and can usually judge what the day is going to be by its atmospheric appearance.

Claudea knew and loved a thousand aspects of this country, though she was more at home on the island among the tall fern and the heather, the rocks and the sea-birds. She had so often come over to St. Castell from the "Nun" that she was really no

stranger on the mainland. Indeed, she and Teilo had many a time wandered all about these very lanes, when as a child Claudea had come to spend the day at the mill in order to play with Sezerina and her brother, and the three had gone to pick blackberries, or had run down to one of the porths to look for shells. The coast walk, which, as we have said, ran for miles in and out of this indented coast, was their favourite hunting-ground. Up above there was always something fresh to find, to see, or to wonder at. Then what famous games they indulged in round about the British cliff-castles, the steep, smooth, grassy sides of which made such delightful slides or runs, and where history on a small scale could be repeated by mimic assaults and mimic defences.

No wonder Claudea looked upon Teilo as another brother, and as one who could always be her friend in need. If her soul had not been so completely bound up with the life of the island, she would have declared that St. Castell's mill was her favourite haunt, for she and Sezerina had so often played among the nooks and crannies of the quaint building, and had talked in whispers of the mysteries of the four great sails.

This evening, however, Claudea began suddenly to feel another influence creeping over her as she walked by Teilo's side along the moonlit road, from whence they could see the windmill drawn out against the sky and on the horizon the highest street of St. Castell, whilst the old church was too much sunk in a hollow to be visible from where they stood. Her

thoughts up to this period of her life had been in a manner so little introspective, so much in union with the natural world around her, that the first feeling of something out of sympathy with this inward peace startled her.

She could not have told why or wherefore, but all at once she felt shy with Teilo, and looking up at him as he walked by her side in silence she saw him with new eyes. She noted his fine manly figure, his deep brow overshadowing the dark eyes—eyes whose earnest look denoted thought and determination. She noticed, too, the smooth, square chin, with its decidedly obstinate expression, and the stern mouth, very occasionally transformed by a smile of strange fascination.

Claudea knew she had never before looked at Teilo in this manner. It was strange, and yet it was true. She did not guess that it was because he was thinking of her, and that his thoughts were dominating her mind.

“Claudea!” he said suddenly.

“Yes, Teilo.”

“I hear your father says he will give you the island when you marry.”

“Why, you said that before, Teilo, and I told you he had said so.”

Teilo smiled.

“I forgot, Claudea; I was speaking my thoughts aloud. Suppose you were to marry a man who doesn’t care about farming, but——”

"But I shan't, Teilo. Father will give me the farm and the island when I marry, and my husband and me will be as happy as father and mother have been for so long. Sylvester and I were happy enough too there, except for Morgan. You know he was always teasing us and doing things contrary, but one generally has to put up with something, and happily for us Morgan was a good deal over at St. Castell."

"What I mean, Claudea, is that when you marry it will be for love of the man whose wife you become. Love is a bigger thing than the island or the farm, and suppose the talent which God has given him doesn't allow him to be a farmer, why, then——"

"Why, then he wouldn't be my husband;" and Claudea laughed so happily that Teilo was bound to smile in sympathy.

"But suppose, just suppose, Claudea, that God called him to the work of preaching, and that he thought——"

"He thought he loved preaching better than he loved me, I would just tell him to give me up to follow the preaching line."

"Don't you be so light-hearted, Claudea. You, with all your deep loving nature, can't you understand that at times there's a call that comes from within, and which seems to tell a man he must obey."

"Leave all and follow Christ," said Claudea, earnestly, after a pause. "Well, yes, I understand well enough, but you Methodists take things so earnest-like. Our parson is as good as any of your preachers, but he doesn't pull such a long face over it. You

don't mean to say——” Claudea stopped short and looked at Teilo. A sudden idea had struck her, so she was silent and walked on faster.

“Yes, I do. I mean to say that——”

“Oh, please don't! I never guessed and never thought of it.”

“I know you didn't. You just thought of me as a brother, dear, and I am that,—but one can't help such things. Love comes to a man like the great wind that blows the big mill-sails round. The impetus may be small at first, but then—oh! you know, Claudea, the big sails can't be stopped easily even by a man's hand, and there's danger in it all; but a woman's finger can guide the machinery, and make the big things obey her will.”

“Teilo, I've never thought of such a thing,” said Claudea, almost in a whisper. “Don't say any more about it, dear; besides, there's father and the island.”

“I know there is everything against me, only I thought, dear Claudea, if there was ever such a little whisper in your heart that in the end—in the end we might be more to each other—I could wait. Nay, I must wait, because I think I ought to see whether the call is a true one; whether I must give up the mill, and go out among the lonely and the God-forsaken folk in our distant villages and preach the good words to them.”

Claudea felt suddenly rebellious and raised her head proudly.

"Oh well, if you don't know whether it's me or the call, you had best wait and see, and say nothing more about it."

Teilo pressed his lips tightly together and said nothing. A fierce struggle was taking place in his mind; he had not known before how fierce could be a man's conflicting thoughts.

"Let's hurry on," added Claudea. "Look here, Teilo, I didn't mean to be unkind, but—no, I've never thought of marrying except in a far-off sort of way. If you want to leave St. Castell and go preaching, and if you don't see your way to farming—you used to say that was what you liked best—why father would never say 'yes' to you, and I couldn't break the old man's heart by leaving him. He and I always understand each other. Besides, we are church-people, and the old church seems to speak plain to me just as the island does. When Mr. Hathaway explains the strange carvings to us, we seem somehow to join hands with the early times. There's no beauty in your Methody chapels. Oh, I must have the beautiful things about me. God teaches us that by everything we see here. He makes nothing ugly."

"But the soul's gone out of it all," said Teilo, forgetting he was pleading against himself. "What's the use of beauty when the spirit of the Lord is gone from it? Your cold formal words don't stir men's hearts to take up the Cross. It's not Mr. Hathaway when he studies books in his comfortable library that will make those poor ignorant fishermen wake up to see

what dull, godless lives they are living. It's our preachers that will do that."

"Well, I don't hold by revivals; no more does father. The men wake up, and think they are wonderful saints, but they soon fall back again. It takes a good long time to beat down a path plain enough to show the way to any place; and as to a road—see how long that takes to make. If the church-people get dull, why—but look, Teilo! we can just see the church from here; doesn't it look beautiful? They have lighted all the lights to-night. I must run. Don't you come with me. There's the nearest road to your chapel." She held out her hand as she spoke.

"Wait one minute, Claudea. Is there no hope of your thinking differently? I didn't know myself till lately what it was which was holding me back. It was the thought of losing you. I saw all at once as it were by a flash of lightning that you were chaining me here. The love of you had grown with my growth and no one warned me, and now, Claudea, it is too strong to snap it off. I can't do it."

"That's a poor sort of love, I'm thinking. Besides, I don't love anybody like that. When I marry, my husband must know he loves me best of all. As to the call—why, Teilo, if so be you hear it, then you had better give up everything and join the preachers. Let's shake hands and be friends again. There's time enough to think of marrying. Mother can't spare me yet, and I can't live away from home and the island. Besides, suppose we did marry and you found

I hindered you, I fancy words would follow." Claudea laughed happily. "I should be jealous of your call, and think I was worth more than your sermons."

"Claudea! is that you?" It was Morgan's surly tones.

Claudea felt suddenly guilty.

"Yes, Morgan, it's me. What do you want?"

"Whatever do you go gallivanting out here for, at night? Father got anxious and sent me out to look for you, and there's a stranger come in, and mother's that flurried she declares she can't go to carol-singing."

"I was at the Porth and I met Teilo! He's seeing me home safe enough. You needn't trouble yourself about me, Morgan."

"You're too old now, Claudea, to go about like this."

"Claudea's safe enough here," put in Teilo quickly. "There's not man or woman that would annoy her."

"Dare say not, but there are some idiots who should know better than to——"

"Do you mean to imply——" said Teilo, suddenly feeling the hot blood mounting to his face, and standing tall and straight in his pride.

"I don't imply anything. I only say if folks see you walking with my sister on the road they'll——"

"How dare you?" said Teilo, suddenly striking out.

"I do dare," retorted Morgan, savagely; and before

Claudea could do more than exclaim, the two broad-shouldered young men were measuring the strength of their fists.

“For shame, for shame, Morgan! how dare you insult Teilo? Leave off.”

But the sudden passion which had raised this storm could not be stilled by a woman’s words. Morgan Dewis was shorter but more thick-set than Teilo, also he was older and stronger; but Teilo Price was more agile, and parried the blows more swiftly, whilst every now and then taking his adversary by surprise he dealt him an unexpected thrust.

In the meanwhile the young girl stood by in an agony of fear for the combatants, who, with set teeth and clenched fists, tried to right their sudden wrongs. They had stepped off the road on to a bit of green-sward close to a wayside pool where the passing cattle often stopped to drink, and where now the moonbeams were broken by the quivering water, troubled by the evening breeze, and reflecting on its broken surface the dark forms of the fighters.

“Morgan, how can you? Fighting for such a little thing, too! And it’s Christmas Eve! What would father say? Teilo, do leave him alone!”

But neither of the combatants heard her words, and though for a moment she thought of thrusting herself between them, she soon perceived how impossible this would be, for the two appeared like only one form, over which ghastly lights and shadows chased each other, as if mocking their impotent struggles.

All at once there was a sound of trotting heard in the distance, and Teilo, making a great effort to free himself from the grasp of Morgan's powerful hand, was able to twist himself a little on one side, and with a well-directed blow to send Claudea's brother reeling a few spaces backward. Morgan could easily have righted himself had he not slipped back upon a large stone, and before he could do more than utter a muttered oath, he found himself rolling into the muddy pool, unable to prevent a ducking and the loss of his dignity.

Teilo stood quite still for a moment without saying a word ; indeed, it took him a few seconds to regain his breath, and he seemed barely conscious of Morgan's ridiculous position till the rider, who had been coming quickly nearer, pulled up at the sight of the two.

"Hulloa, who is here? Good heavens! Morgan, have you been cooling yourself in that mud? It's hardly the spot to choose for a clean bath."

"Oh, Sylvester, it's you!" cried Claudea, stepping close to her brother. "Oh, I'm glad you've come over. Do make the peace between them—Teilo and Morgan have had words, and—"

"What, fighting! and with a girl to look on. For shame, Morgan!"

"I'll thank you to mind your own business, Sylvester," said Morgan, struggling out of the mud.

"So I will," answered his brother, bursting out laughing, "but I don't advise you to appear at the

carol-singing in that plight. You'll frighten the girls into fits."

Morgan Dewis now seemed to turn his anger against his brother. He looked up at him with an angry scowl which made Claudea shudder as she noticed it.

"Silvester," she murmured, "leave him alone; he's angry. Let me walk home with you."

"You'll both of you be sorry for this night's work," said Morgan, shaking himself free of his thick coat of mud and water; then, with another muttered oath, he took a side-road, and for a few seconds the tread of his heavy footsteps could be heard by the three whom he had left standing on the high road. Silvester dismounted as he remarked—

"What's all this about, Claudea?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Morgan's in one of his tempers. Good-bye, Teilo. I'll walk on with Silvester."

Teilo still stood motionless near the pool. His whole frame was quivering from the struggle he had gone through, and as he watched Claudea and Silvester walk away towards St. Castell he seemed to realize at last that he was now alone and that he had been giving way to fierce passion.

"Oh, God!" he said, "what have I done? I who have been talking of preaching to others."

At this moment the bells of the old church burst forth clear and joyful through the evening air— "Peace and good will towards men! Peace and good will, good will and peace!"



CHAPTER III.

A STRANGER GUEST.

“Therefore, now I'll love no more
As I've doted heretofore ;
He who must be, shall be poor.”

HE old church was crammed on this Christmas Eve night. All the worshippers thought it their duty to come to this service, if they came to none other in the year. The feeling dated perhaps from the ancient Druidical days, for at her coming Christianity appropriated to herself many of the old heathen customs which, having taken deep root in some of the so-called indigenous races, could not easily be eradicated. The peasants round St. Castell did not think it a hardship to walk miles to these special services, and religiously and secretly observed many an ancient superstitious rite, fully believing that the luck of the coming year depended on their exact fulfilment. One of these superstitions was that on this night the worshippers must enter the churchyard only by the east entrance, and walk down the thirty-nine steps which led down to the south door of the massive building. It was a picturesque

sight enough to see the pilgrims coming slowly and solemnly down these weather-worn steps on this special moonlight evening. All were wishing each other "A Merry Christmas," intermingling their wishes with scraps of news relating to more worldly affairs than the birth of the Prince of Peace. There had been a wreck some miles off, and there was some money to be made out of the drift-wood—one would give the labour if another lent the horses. Farmer Penbery's cows had sickened in a strange manner last week—some said it was witchcraft, or else the disease, but the first conjecture was the more probable. Widow Liddy's cottage was to be swept away by the next high tide—old Betty Croon had prophesied it, because she had dreamt the fact twice over, and so on.

Silvester and Claudea reached the top of the steps by the Pubbles, as the stony path was called, just as the bells ceased ringing, but they found Mrs. Dewis waiting for them, looking flustered and anxious.

"Whatever have you been doing, Claudea?" was the mother's greeting. "I thought you were lost, child; and father's been keeping on so. He's gone in with a stranger who wants to attend carol-singing, but I just said I'd wait. And so you've come over, Silvester; well, I am glad enough to see you. A merry Christmas to you, my boy. How is White-ear? Has she got over her trouble? If I had had a moment of time I'd have gone over, but I haven't been able to leave father and all the business of the house.

There, I mustn't talk any more; we must get in. Claudea, my dear, you look pale."

So talking on somewhat at random Mrs. Dewis walked solemnly down the steps followed by her son and daughter, and all remembered the old superstition without mentioning it.

Then they entered the beautiful church and walked hurriedly up to their seat, where already the landlord of the "Mermaid" and the stranger were seated. Claudea had no eyes for anything this evening; indeed, once on her knees, she forgot where she was, and she could only go over again in her own mind the exciting scene she had unwittingly originated and shared. What had Teilo said to her? What was this new strange feeling which filled her mind with wonderings? Claudea had not been one to talk of love and lovers; she had been so much away from petty gossip that there had been but little space left in her mind for such things. Her great love had been for her island home, for her father, mother, and for Silvester. Sezerina had often chatted about lovers, but Claudea had not taken much notice, for Sezerina was a feather-headed girl. Her own mother said so, and remarked how unlike she was to Teilo, but then she was gentle and affectionate, and loved Claudea with all her heart—the love in this instance being certainly born of contrast. Claudea was to her the embodiment of all that was strong, beautiful, and superior. Her occasional waywardness was an additional charm in Sezerina's eyes, and if Teilo had not

been of the same mind he would long ago have tired of hearing Claudea's praises from his sister's lips.

This evening it was Sezerina who watched her friend's entrance into church, for she had slipped away from her family to hear the carols in church, and also to see Claudea, the sight of Claudea being infinitely nicer to her than the grave dull prayers at the chapel, where she incurred Teilo's anger if she laughed or looked about.

Sezerina was short and stout in person, and was always inclined to giggle with or without sufficient reason. Her face was freckled, her nose turned up, her mouth large by nature and made wider by smiles. There seemed no solid foundation to her motives, and the only lasting feeling she appeared to possess was her love and admiration for Claudea, and a general wish to do as she was asked.

She had chosen a seat whence she could see Claudea, and at the entrance of her friend she was struck by her paleness and by her strange frightened expression.

“What has Claudea been doing? I've never seen her look like that—and la! what a fine gentleman is sitting with Mr. Dewis. He must be a traveller. He's just the right height for Claudea. What a handsome pair they would make! I wish I was handsome, that I do. Teilo says it's a snare of the Devil and a stumbling-block for sinners, but I'd risk the snares if so be I could change with Claudea. How she fixes her pretty eyes! La! one would say she is wandering

away from her body. There's something up. I fancy she's been to the Porth and been staring at the island till she's dazed. She don't even notice the stranger, but he's looking at her—just out of the corners of his eyes, so sly-like. The men all look at the pretty girls, and never so much as squint at me. The gifts of nature aren't given fairly like, though Teilo does say, 'We should be thankful to be born straight and square and with one leg no shorter than the other, nor deaf and dumb like poor Dumb Davy.' 'Hark the Herald Angels sing!' Well, they do sing, but I can't. Nature didn't mean me to be an angel, for I've no voice, and there's Claudea who can sing so sweetly, better than any in all St. Castell, and she does not care one farthing about it. Yes, I can see Teilo at home turning round a wee bit whenever Claudea begins her snatches of songs, though he does say we should only sing to the glory of God. There now, the stranger's heard Claudea's voice; I can see him pricking up his ears like our dog Toby. Dogs are awfully knowing, and Claudea says cows are just human. There's Mr. Tramerin, the new curate, looking at me. He's wondering why I'm here. Claudea's still in the clouds. Well, I suppose she's with the angels. They should be mighty pleased to see her. I wonder if she'll walk home with me? I'll soon shake her awake."

Such was Sezerina's mental pathway during the carols. Her thoughts would not go upwards, and were not even like the sparks that die striving to

reach a higher plane. One more burst of the organ, and then Mr. Tramerin mounted the pulpit steps and spoke a few words to his congregation. "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation," was his text, and he was decidedly eloquent.

Claudea at last woke up and listened, but the words did not seem meant for her. She wanted to know the future, not the present. She wanted to feel that she need not think of Teilo's words—why should she, if he wanted to live another life from hers? He would never be able to sympathize with her love of beauty, her love of nature. He would always want her to be stern and religious. True, Sezerina was neither, but Teilo despised his sister, and often said that she had no earnestness and no religious purpose. What was love? Did she love Teilo? If Teilo had told her he loved her, he must mean it very much indeed—but—but—

Mrs. Dewis gave her daughter a little nudge to wake her up.

"Come, Claudea, are you asleep? Can't you walk out? Silvy, you'll come home to supper? The moon will serve for going across late. How's the tide?"

Silvester nodded his assent to the offer of supper, and then the Dewis family followed the congregation as they scattered themselves in groups in the church-yard, talking and laughing in half-subdued tones.

"A merry Christmas, Claudea! You were nearly late. I expect it was island-gazing you were at! A

regular home-sick child you are. Silvester's come, I see. Let me walk home with you. Teilo and the others won't be home for ever so long. Oh, la ! wasn't old Mrs. Jones a figure of fun. I know her bonnet hasn't had new strings since I was eight years old. It's this way, sir, to the 'Mermaid.' I see Mrs. Dewis is going to speak to a neighbour."

Sezerina could not resist accosting the stranger, and he seemed very willing to be spoken to as he courteously approached the two girls. He had been filled with surprise at the sight of the landlord's daughter, whose tardiness he had heard discussed on the way to the church.

"I hope," he said, addressing Claudea, "you had not lost your way. I heard your mother lamenting your absence."

Claudea looked up quickly into his face with the half-frightened, half-inquiring look of a shy animal, who has not quite made up its mind whether the newcomer is a friend or a foe. She saw beside her a gentleman in a rough travelling suit, whose face was keen but kindly, and whose half-scornful smile was nullified by a certain tenderness of expression in his eyes—an expression which was very reassuring.

"You are a stranger, of course, sir, or else you would know I couldn't lose my way."

"I should think Claudea couldn't, indeed! Why, she's better than a man at going about. She can beat Teilo—that's my brother—at the oar; and don't you remember, Claudea, you won the race once down

to the Porth when we three laid a wager on the one who should arrive there first?"

"I was a girl then, and I ran all the way," said Claudea, laughing.

"Ah! there's the child!" exclaimed her father, coming up with the waddling gait caused by his portly size. "What did you do, miss, to make your mother so fidgety?"

"I was down at the Porth just watching," said Claudea quickly.

"Watching what, may I ask?" said the stranger.

Claudea laughed. "Well, just the island, sir. It is my home, and I was a bit homesick to-night."

"This seems to me enough out of the way without wishing for any other, but I am delighted to hear there is a still more quiet nook. I hope you will let me go there. I have come to bury myself in the loneliest place I could find on consulting a map."

Sezerina laughed.

"Well, that is strange. I'm always wishing St. Castell wasn't so dull, but Claudea here prefers the island, and that's duller."

"You call it 'the island,' but as I drove here this afternoon I saw many islands in the distance."

"There are many, but there's but one about here that has any house upon it, and that's our farm. We lived there for years; we have only lately moved, for mother is getting old and felt it to be too lonely. If you are ill, there's the boat to be sent for the doctor, and

if the sea is bad it's not every doctor that will venture forth."

"But Claudea is never one bit afraid," put in her friend.

The stranger looked at the lithe figure beside him, and noted its many perfections and the bright intelligence of the beautiful face.

"You don't look strong enough to manage a boat in a rough sea, however," he said, noting the small hands.

"Strong! I'm very strong, and I have handled an oar since I was almost a baby."

They had now reached the door of the "Mermaid," and Claudea stepped up to Silvester.

"You'll not say anything about Morgan and Teilo, will you, Silvy?"

"Why should I? But I declare Morgan is getting worse every year. His temper will get him into trouble one of these days."

"Silvester, you had better stay the night, and go back to-morrow. You ought to spend Christmas Day with us," said Mrs. Dewis. "Morris and Betty can be trusted for a night, I reckon, and then there's Morgan will be wanting to see you."

"Morgan never wants to see anyone, least of all his brother," said Silvester, laughing; "but I'll stay, mother, if you wish it."

"And Sezerina had better stay to supper," said Claudea quickly. She wanted to have the presence of a stranger, so as to make Morgan behave at least civilly.

"Thank you, but Teilo will want me, and mother and father will say I prefer you to them. I would dearly love to stay all the same, Claudea. Well, good night, and a merry Christmas to you!"

Sezerina tripped away, and Silvester smiled and nodded at her as she turned back a moment to wave her hand at her friends.

Then the Dewis family went in to eat their supper. The stranger had ordered his meal to be taken in to him in his private sitting-room, for there was nothing cheerful for him at this Christmas tide; he had nothing but his own sad thoughts.

At supper-time Mrs. Dewis discussed the unexpected traveller, whilst Morgan sat at table looking sullen and hardly opening his mouth, but Claudea forced herself to appear light-hearted, feeling very much the reverse.

"Who is this stranger?" asked Morgan in a surly voice, addressing his mother.

"The 'Mermaid' is open to anyone who looks respectable. It's not for me to inquire, of course. When you were gone, Claudea, this gentleman drove up in a hired conveyance from Harwood East, and said he wanted a bedroom and a sitting-room for an indefinite time. He wanted solitude, he said. 'Well, sir,' says I, 'you can have all that and more here.' Which is true. He said, 'Certainly it seems I can, for you are as far away from a railway as you can be. I want peace and quiet for my work.' 'Are you an artist-gentleman?' I said, and then he laughed and

said, 'No, I am a writing gentleman, but I'll pay my bills and give you no trouble.' Then he heard we were going to carol-singing, and said he would come too. That's the long and short of it. What do you think of him, Claudea? You are always so particular."

"Oh, I haven't looked at him," said Claudea. "I had other things to think of."

"He seems young and good-looking, I should say," remarked Silvester, "which is to his advantage. But I don't fancy men who have no real occupation. A painting chap is bad enough, but——"

"No one is good enough for Silvester," muttered Morgan.

"Come now, it's Christmas Eve, my boys. It's not a night for dispute, least of all between brothers," said Mrs. Dewis. "Have some pie, Morgan. Was Dumb Davy at church, Claudea?"

"No, I think not. His mother wanted his company; she's too ill to come out. Poor Davy, he sits and looks at the boat, longing for me to go over."

This evening the men sat some time over their supper, long after Claudea and her mother had retired to the kitchen to give the girl a helping hand. When they were in the passage, the parlour door opened, and the stranger lingered in the doorway, watching the moonlight bathing the great village cross which stood a little way down the street.

"Miss Claudea, if your brother is going over, perhaps he'll take me to your island to-morrow?"

"Oh yes, sir. I'm going, too, so I'll bring you back. Dumb Davy will give me a helping hand."

"Thank you. I am quite curious to see this island. A merry Christmas to you and good-night!"

"He seems a pleasant-spoken young man," said Mrs. Dewis, "but I dare say he'll be tired of the place in a week. They always are—the men who do nothing in particular."

When Claudea was in bed she lay awake thinking and thinking about the events of that day. Teilo loved her. He must always have loved her, but—What would her father say? he didn't like Teilo because he was a Methodist. The Dewis family had always been church-people. Besides, there was a secret rivalry between the miller and the landlord, a secret and unacknowledged race for riches, and a secret and almost acknowledged contempt of each other's religion. As to letting Claudea marry a Price, it was a thing in old Dewis' mind not to be contemplated. Claudea must marry a gentleman-farmer. They would be glad to get her money, and as to beauty—she was beautiful enough to marry a king!

"No," said Claudea to herself, "I mustn't decide. If Teilo hadn't fought with Morgan it would have been easier; but how strong he looked, and wasn't he brave? Teilo made me care a little bit. He isn't only a Methody, no, he is a brave man; but I don't love him as one must love one's husband. But that higher life he is always talking about, I don't under-

stand it ; no, I'm only a stupid girl, I don't see what it means. I wish Morgan wasn't living here ; I wish he would go away. I'm afraid of him. I'm afraid of what he'll do to Sylvester and Teilo. It isn't peace, good will on earth yet—no, not yet." Then Claudea fell asleep, and woke no more till it was Christmas Day.





CHAPTER IV.

TELLING THORDIS.

“But love is such a mystery,
I cannot find it out ;
For when I think I’m best resolved,
I then am in most doubt.”

DIN his private room at the “Mermaid” Herbert Ravenscroft woke up to a new epoch in his life. He had fled from disappointment with the determination to put as many miles as possible between himself and his sorrow. He had private means, but no near relations, and he had dreamt a dream of love and joy which had suddenly faded and dissolved its fairy fabric into mere nothingness. This morning, when he woke up and heard the Christmas bells ringing their joyous peals, he recollect ed that at last he was free, quite free to do as he pleased with himself and with his future life. He was by profession an author, but an author who wrote much and published little. He was very angry with the modern deluge of undigested words, and he raged at the flood of foolishness which was daily offered to feed the multitude. He had

once fancied he could live and die satisfied with literature, but suddenly one day, quite by chance—a happy chance he called it then—he had met a young girl, gracious in manner, pretty, delicate, highly educated and highly emotional—in fact, a sweet, modern hot-house plant. She was the daughter of Lord Cornleigh, and her father was her devoted slave. She loved books better than balls, and very soon it was noticed that the Hon. Miss Ashton was always to be seen in company with Herbert Ravenscroft, the author, whose works were few but choice. The dream was very sweet whilst it lasted. Herbert fancied he had discovered a precious pearl, a jewel he could wear with pride and distinction ; but if Georgina Ashton appeared a being of angelic simplicity to him, she was a puzzle to herself. She had no pride of caste, but fancied herself a patroness of art and literature ; so that she easily fell in love with Herbert Ravenscroft, and delighted to be the chosen one. She was naturally yielding, and for a time she believed her lover to be cast in a perfect mould. Then she began to weary of him, and of the high standard she had set up for herself. She met a musician, who told her she was his dream of harmony and the keynote of his life. As she was very fond of music, she found the musician's phrases more emotional than the classical form of Herbert's writings. The musician was a man who never seemed to be the least aware of his or other people's prior engagements. He was too emotional himself to feel the emotion of his fellow-

creatures, so without apology he quietly stepped into Herbert's place.

Georgina confessed her change of mind to Herbert with such sweet contrition that he was obliged to acknowledge she was not a flirt, but merely an emotional woman, who could no more help changing her mind than she could help growing older. It is no use being angry with the inevitable in nature, or abusing a broken silken cobweb. Herbert saw this; only he had deeply loved this girl, and had believed in her superior nature as he believed in her superior birth.

"Let us always be friends," she said, but he shook his head.

"I shall leave London," he replied, "and I shall bury myself somewhere and try and forget you. If I go on seeing you I shall lose all power of work."

"Please don't," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I can never forget you, or all you have taught me; but how can I worship literary perfection when all my soul seems to be floating away to another dreamland, and someone else has more power to raise me higher?"

Herbert did not even look at her then. His ideal woman also fled away into another dreamland. He would in future live for himself and his own ideas, and he would live and learn to forget!

"I have certainly found the right place to do this," he thought as he looked out this morning over the distant landscape, and saw the many islands floating, as it were, on waving lines of blue sea, and noted the

miniature mountains with their exquisite outlines, giving strength to the flat ruggedness of the plain. Above all, there came to him the mysterious smell of the sea, wafted from the depths of sea-life and invisible waves of ozone.

Then he remembered the evening service of the previous night, and the kindness of the landlord and his family, and especially he remembered the daughter's beautiful, earnest face—the girl with the strangely pronounced name of Claudea. How unlike she was to his lost Gina, whose pale, æsthetic face showed so easily the wayward workings of an over-civilized mind. Among these people all was simplicity of thought and of religion, which to Herbert appeared as refreshing as this salt-sea smell. He did not mean to attach himself greatly to life again. His own books and the book of nature would be enough for him. He would study primitive man and woman in this lonely bit of land as one studies a new language, or a new dialect of an old speech, and try to forget his fickle love. Nature could not deceive her children, and there could at least be no complications due to over-civilization at St. Castell and in its quiet hotel.

The bells of the old grey church clashed out, "Peace on earth, good will towards men," and the young man listened. Here at all events there was peace, and with a sigh of relief Herbert Ravenscroft unpacked his books and his few possessions before he sauntered down to the church.

He did not sit with the Dewis family this time;

indeed, he kept away from them, partly from a feeling of not wishing to intrude upon them, and partly because he now much preferred courting a solitary life. A stout, though comely servant brought up his Christmas dinner in silence, but when she was re-treating she said shyly :

“ If you please, sir, Mister Silvester is going over to the island at two o’clock, and would you please to go over with him. It’s the tide that will be right by then.”

Herbert’s curiosity was excited about this island, and he sent word he would be ready at the time named. Miss Claudea was to row him back, he knew, and that in itself was a new experience. The very idea of so much energy in such a young girl took away the recollection or any comparison he might wish to make between her and the delicate and languid Gina. Why had she not been brought up in this love of nature instead of in drawing-rooms of over-forced feelings—why?

When he went downstairs he found Claudea waiting for him. He was again much struck with the beautifully-cut face, and with the dark soft eyes and their occasional flashes of mirth or surprise. The bright colour on the oval cheeks, the firm chin and white teeth were a revelation to him of perfect health, and the whole picture was calculated to give the gazer a feeling of living out of doors with fresh winds blowing on one’s face and the smell of the sea in one’s nostrils.

“ I thought if you came alone you would miss your

way," said Claudea, simply. "My brother has gone on to get the boat out, but if by mistake you wandered on to another porth we should lose the tide—Davy, Dumb Davy!" she called out, at the same time making a rapid sign with her right hand, and then Herbert saw that he was not to walk alone with Claudea, but that a strange-looking boy was to accompany them. Dumb Davy's face was evidently that of a being who was almost a natural, and yet there was also, as is often the case, a cunning look in his small grey eyes. Herbert was interested at once in this curious study. He noted the boy's glance of dog-like fidelity at Claudea as the lad appeared carrying some cushions, fishing tackle, and a small basket of provisions.

"He's deaf and dumb, sir," said Claudea, "but he always comes with me. Together we can manage our boat; it wants two when there are sails to be hoisted. We shall not have long to-day, for the tide is not convenient, and perhaps you would not like the tossing we get when the flood is running fast. We must catch it at the turn. The currents are dreadfully strong between the Porth and the island. Do you see that at both ends there is only a narrow channel, opening out to the open sea, though from here it is but two miles across from the Porth. Then one has to mind that great reef of sharp rocks you see yonder. They call them the Whelps."

"And you love your island home dearly?" asked Herbert, trying to draw her out.

Claudea laughed.

“Don’t you love your home?”

“I have none; and even as a boy I was sent from one relation to another. Books are my only friends now.”

“I am sorry,” said Claudea, simply. “Here everyone is our friend, and one cannot be lonely in our island, even though Sezerina says so. The birds and the waves are always talking.”

Claudea’s mind was cast in a naturally poetic mould. The life she had lived had much increased her inborn artistic tendencies, so that her love of all the living things around her seemed to have become second nature. Herbert had never dreamt or expected to find such a character among one of Claudea’s class, and he was extremely astonished. What Gina had expressed from hearing it said around her, and without really feeling it, Claudea both felt and expressed in simple words. It was her life. He noted the free, graceful motion of her step. She walked as one accustomed to untiring exercise and without apparent effort. She wore a short skirt of native linsey which showed her neat ankles. Herbert had never before noticed the poetry of motion in a woman’s walk unfettered by the trammels of fashionable skirts, and the sight taught him a lesson of art he little expected to learn here. The three walked on in silence for some time, Dumb Davy keeping close beside Claudea, much as if he were a faithful dog following at his master’s heels. After a time Claudea did not seem

to be aware of Herbert Ravenscroft's presence, and in truth she was going over in her own mind all the events of the previous day. Her heart was heavy at the thought of Teilo's revelation and of Morgan's fierce anger. She wanted to ask someone's advice, but to whom could she turn? They ascended the brow of the hill beyond the old church, and then walked a mile further on the flat road leading to the Porth. Every now and then Claudea shaded her eyes and looked steadily towards the distant horizon.

"The sea will be all right to-day," she said at last. "There are days when even we don't go over, do we, Davy?" and she made signs to the boy.

The mute nodded his assent.

"Here is the cliff path, Mr. Ravenscroft. If you look across you will see we have not a minute to spare."

Herbert gazed in the direction of the sea, but did not arrive at this conclusion, knowing nothing of sea moods or tides. He, however, saw spread out before him a lovely vision of nature—a rock-surrounded bay, and beyond a distance of sea inlaid with islands of various hues. A little shelving landing-stage had been built in the middle of this tiny bay to facilitate the launching of the lifeboat, and here Silvester was at this very moment just floating the little "Seagull," which impatiently seesawed on the lapping waves.

"There you are; make haste, Claudea! You are none too early. Good afternoon, sir. Excuse my

hurrying you on, but if we can run in with the tide at the other end we are safer."

"I could not hurry a stranger," said Claudea quietly. Then laughing and turning towards Herbert she added, "I usually run down here in half the time we have taken to come, but then Dumb Davy and I never talk on the road."

Herbert felt much amazed. He had been accustomed to be looked up to as a man of talent, but here he seemed to be merely a gentleman who could not walk fast. In spite of his answering laugh he was a little nettled, nor was he much comforted by noting that he was put away at the stern much like a bundle of useless cargo, and that the active Claudea at once began to manipulate the sails with the ease and skill born of long habit. The mute busied himself over ropes and sails, and Silvester, after casting an eye at various details, in order to assert his superior sex, left the two to manage alone.

"Claudea is well able to do it all," he said half aside, as if to reassure the stranger as to his safety. "So you mean to stay a little time with us, sir?" he inquired, with the air of perfect politeness which Herbert Ravenscroft had noticed the previous evening—a politeness which was courtesy and interest combined in its due proportion.

"I think that in this lonely spot there must be peace, so I mean to stay as long as I can."

Silvester smiled.

"Yes and no. Human nature's much the same everywhere I expect, sir; but we are quiet enough here in the winter. Still there's always plenty to do, and that keeps a man out of the clutches of the Devil. Now my brother is at the "Mermaid," and he thinks himself badly used because father left me at the farm yonder. The truth is Morgan and the men can't work together; they won't pull with one will; so it's no use their trying to do it, but Morgan can't get over it. He's always brooding over it. I tell him that anyhow it's not for long that I'm settled there, for father has always said the island is for Claudea here when she marries."

Herbert looked suddenly at Claudea, who, standing up to her full height, was stretching her arms up to alter the rope passing through a pulley. The wind played with her stray curling meshes of hair as if fighting for the next kiss on her sweet forehead, and the colour that made her beauty perfect spread to her chin just touching her brown neck.

"This girl is more beautiful than any London beauty," said Herbert suddenly to himself, "and she has not a shade of self-consciousness. Perhaps even she does not know she is beautiful. The man who marries her will have a perfectly-formed Hebe for his wife; but most likely it is merely outside charm."

The boat danced over the waves and sailed on in an oblique direction towards the island, occasionally tacking suddenly for a few moments, then bounding on again towards its destination.

"It's near two miles from here to the island," continued Sylvester, seeing the stranger gazing across the channel, "and the two hills you see yonder are over four hundred feet above the sea; otherwise the rest of the land is pretty level, but the cliffs all round are steep enough. The nearest point to land is only half a mile away, but look at that ridge of rocks. They look, don't they, like the teeth of some wild animals waiting for their prey? They come nearly half way across, and we call them the Whelps. It's they that help to make this powerful current, sir, and that's where lies the danger of the crossing. It's never smooth near the Whelps, and even in summer-time you can hear the sound of the sea breaking over them. Round here, when we hear that noise, we say the Whelps are howling."

"Then it is full of danger, this pretty bay?" said Herbert, already conscious of the strong motion of the boat.

"I should think so! The whole Sound is full of currents and eddies, and there are several sunken rocks. It's like a mill-stream here, and you may very easily be carried out to sea. We land close to the farm out there where the Whelps begin to jut out. Shall I take an oar, Claudea? The wind's getting strong. We shall have to row in."

"Let be," was the answer. "We are going splendidly." Claudea stood up, and her eyes glistened with pleasure as she gazed at the island. "I'll have you in very quickly with this wind."

"Your sister is unusually clever with a boat," said Herbert, looking admiringly at the girl.

"Claudea can do most things," said Silvester, smiling. "Father's let her have her own way. Morgan says it's sure to ruin a woman, but Morgan's jealous. I say a woman ought to please herself. You needn't be afraid, sir, Claudea can take you back safe enough. But you must see this place at bird-nesting time. There's all sorts come here. At this moment there's only gulls and such like. Look, sir, on your right, that's Wellog Island. There's enough grass there for two sheep, and that's the Spire which rises near it—a sharp rock that. About here we call it the Spire, but it's real name is Bery-rock. On the south of our island is the Idol, and out yonder, the other side, is the Dean and Canons, a set of islands close to each other, where a few sheep can feed."

Herbert Ravenscroft looked in surprise at this wonderful miniature archipelago, forming a long irregular line nearly four miles in length, and whose islets and lonely rocks were of every shape and colour. The Dean and Canons, seven in number, just peeped out behind the Nun, and on the biggest of them, the Dean, Herbert saw a small lighthouse rising picturesquely above the white surf of the waves.

"That must indeed be a lonely situation," he remarked.

"Well, yes. The two Fentons live there, and one

of them comes over to our farm for provisions, if so be he can't reach the mainland.—Claudea, bring us in on the inside of the Whelps, it will be easier for the gentleman."

The "Sea-gull" made a graceful bend, and skirting the Whelps, which, indeed, had all the time been kept at a respectful distance, the little boat with slight heavings, as of a wearied bird, glided into the miniature break-water formed by the island rocks.

"They say there's remains here of old Druid times," remarked Silvester, "but it's difficult to say if that is Gospel truth.—Here, Claudea, throw the rope and steady the boat."

Dumb Davy was now left in charge of the "Sea-gull," and Claudea ran lightly up the rocky steps to the farm which nestled just above them. Once on her native shore the girl seemed to forget everything but her own past longings for home. She ran into the dwelling-room, gave orders to get some tea ready for the stranger; then going through the back regions she hurried on to visit the sick cow and the other pets of the homestead. That done, she called out that she would be ready to return in an hour; then plunging into the dead fern and grassy slopes she began to ascend the hill.

It did not take more than a quarter of an hour to reach the summit, which was marked by a ship's colossal figure-head. It represented a woman down to her knees, carved in wood and then painted. It had been placed against a cairn of stones, and thus sheltered by

this rude altar the figure seemed to gaze ever across the sea towards the mainland.

No one knew its history or how it came there. Doubtless some sailors must have saved it from a wreck, and then placed this ancient image in her present position. Rude as was the carving and painting, it showed great artistic power and simple strength. The lines were free, and the impassive face handsome and mysterious. A look of calm pride had been so well impressed upon the face that it was unmistakable, and inspired admiration and respect for the unknown sculptor. He had certainly realized his ideal as he had fashioned this woman with her sphinx-like calmness and impassive scorn of base things.

It must be owned that on the island many superstitions had gathered round this figure. On one of the folds of her loose garment gathered in at her waist was cut in rude character "Thordis," and without owning it to anyone Thordis was the love of Claudea's youthful days. She had had no dolls and few playfellows, but had made Thordis her companion. Year by year the child had measured herself by Thordis to see if she were growing quickly. She had told Thordis her youthful sorrows and her secret joys, and she had tried to clasp her small hands round the neck of Thordis by climbing up the perilous cairn. She loved this Thordis passionately, and with all the strength of her young heart. One great arm of the carved figure was lifted, the hand supporting the cheek, whilst the other

was placed across her breast. Her bosom, half bare, was crossed by the rude folds of her vesture, and round her waist was a girdle hanging stiffly down by the still stiffer folds. To Claudea, however, Thordis was the embodiment of all female beauty, and the silent comforter of all sorrow-laden folk. To-day, after gazing over the sea for a long time in deep silence, the girl threw herself down upon the soft withering ferns which hid the grassy mounds of the rabbits. Then creeping close to the huge folds of Thordis' dress, with a sudden impulse she sobbed forth, "Oh, Thordis, Thordis, what shall I do? what shall I do? He loves me—and I—I don't know what to say."

At this moment Herbert Ravenscroft had reached the cairn unnoticed and unheard. The girl's sobs and her bitter cry for help at the foot of the strange carving filled him with surprise, yet it fitted in with the beauty of the scene and its strange desolation. In silent sympathy for the sorrow of a fellow-creature he quickly retreated, and making a *détour* at the bottom of the hill he was seen no more till he found his way to the landing-place, where Claudea was quietly waiting for him in the boat ready to sail back to the mainland.





CHAPTER V.

A PROMISE.

“There’s a world of capability
For joy spread round about us, meant for us,
Inviting.”



ESTWARD the sunset was painting a wondrous picture of unearthly beauty. Long ribbons of red were stretched across the western sky, alternating with bands of gold, orange, and primrose. All the most westernly islets seemed to be floating in waves of crimson and ochre, whilst the moon and a few faint stars began to rival in beauty the after-glories of the departing sun. Claudea and Dumb Davy had hauled down the sails and furled them closely ; then each taking a pair of oars they skilfully steered clear of the last cruel teeth of the Whelps as they made straight for the opening of the Porth. The young man sat back silently against the cushioned corner, and feasted his eyes on the beauty of the scene, scarcely believing that a week ago he had been saying good-bye to Gina and believing that all life was ended for him. This exquisite beauty of nature was better than even his beloved books ; those silent friends could not present to him such

palpitating colour, such exquisite tones, as did this wild nature, so lavish of her gifts to the just and to the unjust. Looking opposite to him Herbert fancied that Claudea was like some ancient sea-nymph disguised in rough garments, who had risen from the waves to row him to a shore of safety after his experience of much turmoil, whilst Dumb Davy was to his imagination more like an evil gnome than a human being.

Claudea had been too much engaged in guiding the boat safely to shore to take any notice of the stranger, but as they entered the calmer water of Porth Caerog she turned her eyes towards him, and her spirit seemed to return from its wanderings. Their eyes met and she smiled—that extraordinary vivid smile which Herbert had never seen before on a woman's face. The contrast between this smile and the sobs he had heard by the old figure-head struck him forcibly. After all, was life as simple down here in this out-of-the-way place as he had imagined it would be?

"I hope you have not been anxious about the safety of the boat, Mr. Ravenscroft? You see that Dumb Davy and myself are well accustomed to the water."

"Indeed, I have been marvelling at your skill, Miss Claudea." Herbert put the right accent upon the word, and this pronunciation seemed to him to have in it a sweet and fascinating sound.

"Oh, anyone can do it with use and attention, you know. I was always fond of the water. I made a wager once I would go over alone, but father forbade it. I expect it might be a little unsafe, but I brought

up Dumb Davy to understand everything I want of him."

"How does he understand you so well?"

"Oh, it's a language of signs. We can say almost anything, but it would take too long to teach you." Claudea smiled. "Besides you come from London, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I suppose it's a wonderful place; but I would rather live on our island. Look at that bird. It's a falcon. They say it's rare, but this one has been about here some time. Well, if I were in London I should feel like that bird put into a cage."

"You would like it perhaps after a time; girls seem to like the noise and bustle of it, and if they are pretty they like all the admiration they get. But still I think that in your case it would take you some time to get accustomed to that sort of life."

"Oh, I should die, just die," said Claudea, with one of her rare smiles. "Here we are. Did Silvy give you some tea? Betty is a rare maker of bread and butter."

"Why didn't you join us, Miss Claudea? Indeed, the meal I had was excellent."

"I couldn't leave the hill," she said simply. "But look, Dumb Davy is getting impatient for his tea. If you will step out, we will haul up the boat."

Herbert could not allow a woman to work whilst he stood idly by, so he immediately gave a helping hand, though he noted Claudea's little smile of scorn

at his evident awkwardness. He was again nettled, but said nothing. When all was put straight, the trio ascended the cliff path, at the top of which Dumb Davy asked to accompany his mistress home.

“No, no,” she said ; “you’re cold and hungry, Davy, and look, your mother is waiting for you.” With true politeness Claudea spoke the words at the same time that she used the signs.

Then she and Herbert began their walk home to St. Castell along the high road opening on all sides into lanes and tracks, whilst around could be seen the glow of the evening sky still casting lovely lights around the departing day.

“It is very beautiful along these lanes,” said Herbert, after a long silence, during which his companion seemed quite wrapped up in her own thoughts. “How exquisite Carn Slymridge looks with its strange jagged outline! Do you ever climb up there? It must be some little way from St. Castell?”

“Yes, you can get a lovely view from the top of it. Teilo Price and Sezerina his sister—you saw her last night—we three often went up there when we were children, and we used to race to the top ; but it’s not such an easy climb as it looks, especially on a windy day.”

Herbert felt at once, though he scarcely knew why, that Teilo Price must be the cause of Claudea’s sorrow. The story began to interest him, and he thought less of Gina that evening after he had taken down his book and his writing materials from the shelf. Claudea

seemed to him to be such a new creation, a woman of whom he had no previous knowledge, and he had no niche for her among the restricted ideas he entertained about women in the abstract. She was, he thought, too good to marry a common man, and then he smiled at the idea of this free, original being appearing in a London drawing-room! Well, all such ideas were now nothing to him, and he dismissed the speculations, only wondering whether he should stay long enough at St. Castell to see Claudea the wife of her rustic lover, or whether this bird were too wild to be caged even by one of her own species. He was engaged in writing an article on "the inability of human nature to remain true to an idea." He meant to use Gina's various states of feeling and mind as the basis of his argument, and this evening by so doing he brought on a useless fit of regret which lasted far on into the silent night. The Dewis family, on the contrary, were all unromantically busy in their various ways, so that it was only Claudea who was able to go to the evening service in the old church, where to-night Mr. Hathaway, the rector, officiated, and preached to about six worshippers.

When Claudea stepped out again into the moonlight she saw a tall form waiting for her outside the church door. It was Teilo.

"Claudea," he said, "I heard you had gone to church, so I followed you, and I've been waiting for you some time. I want to walk home with you if you will let me. Come across here," and he led the

way past the west end of the building and over the little bridge which crossed a rivulet, and round by the old grey walls and monastic ruins. Further on, this path led into the village by a longer way, following which one had to climb a steep field path, and to get over two tall stiles.

"They'll be waiting supper at home," said Claudea, hesitating a minute before following Teilo.

"Well, then, let them wait just for once. Listen, Claudea, I have come to tell you that yesterday I—I—" he paused, "I sinned against the higher call. I am no longer worthy to teach others. Morgan roused all the old Adam within me, and I gave place to the Devil. I must give it up, Claudea."

"Morgan is very cruel," said the girl slowly. "He has never loved me. He did it to anger me, but I don't see why you should give up your duty so easily. But you must do what you think is right, Teilo."

"I must wait and see. You won't help me, or give me any hope for the future, will you? Besides, Morgan will do me harm if he can. No, I see I'm not worthy yet to labour in the vineyard. I had best take to the mill, as my father wishes me to do. In that case, Claudea——"

Claudea felt a chill of disappointment. Yesterday the idea of Teilo's becoming a preacher had sounded very self-denying conduct on his part; to-day it seemed somewhat tame of him to give it up so easily, and yet if he became a preacher she knew that her father would never consent to a marriage between

them. She recognized the fact that in her heart she wished the possibility of a marriage with him to be taken away from her personal choice.

"We had best say nothing about the future," she said, laughing. "I'm happy enough without thinking of it; and then, too, I'm over young for marrying, mother will tell you so."

"But look here, Claudea, I've thought of it all night. I know now that even if I became a preacher, the thought of you would come between me and the saving of poor souls. I shall be useless, quite useless, if you won't say 'yes.' If you care, your father will never hold out. I am sure of that."

Claudea looked up at the tall handsome man who towered above her. His keen, smooth face and dark eyes were very sad, and his lips tightly pressed together.

"Father is very determined at times, and your father and he aren't the best of friends, you know, Teilo. If father says 'no,' why he means *no*. Do you know that I've been to the island to-day?"

"With Sylvester and that stranger—Sezerina told me so. Who is he, and what does he mean to do here?" Teilo spoke quickly. He felt as if anyone who was with Claudea must admire her. There was that possible danger even with strangers.

"I don't know. He is a man who wants quiet for writing books, I think—an author. But I fancy he has had some trouble, poor man. One thing I'm sure of—he's very ignorant about out-of-door things, and he couldn't manage a boat at all," and Claudea laughed heartily.

"He'll be going soon, I suppose," said Teilo, looking glum.

"I don't know, but he is able to pay handsomely, mother says, and he is very kind and thoughtful. We all like him."

They had reached the first stile, and Teilo, vaulting over, offered his hand to Claudea, who rejected it.

"Why, Teilo, I've not turned into a town miss, even if I have been with a London gentleman."

"You're very proud and independent, Claudea. I had better go away altogether, if—if—"

"You don't seem to know your own mind, Teilo dear. I'm afraid you'll be changing it very soon again."

"No, I shall not change my mind if you will give me a promise."

"Anyhow I'm not going to become engaged to anyone, Teilo, and Morgan says I'm so young and unfeeling. Perhaps I am." The clear soft laugh that accompanied these words made Teilo angry.

"You do not understand me, Claudea; you are too young to care about the things of God. I had best give you up, and keep to my intention of becoming a preacher."

The two had reached the second stile, which was close to the side street, and not two minutes' walk from the "Mermaid." They instinctively turned round and gazed at the old church lying at their feet, and now bathed in moonlight, whilst beyond was the dark outline of Carn Slymridge, and on the left

the line of distant sea. Suddenly Claudea turned round.

"Oh, Teilo, don't be angry with me. It is all new to me. I don't understand it. Your love frightens me; it seems so strange, so—so—I can't find any answer in my heart. How can I explain myself? You seem to be dividing your heart between me and God. There'll be harm come of it, Teilo. Give me up till you know. Ask God to tell you. We don't think alike—you see that. Your grave, serious religion frightens me, but I know you are good, I know it. You are not like Morgan, but you do not understand my love for the island. You would think me foolish, and you would want to go all about far away on the mainland and preach to the poor. That seems a noble work, but it wants all your heart, I am sure it does. I should be jealous of your work; and then, oh, Teilo, suppose I could not make you happy. You have such grand ideas, and I—I just want to be happy and to see father and mother looking happy. I'm not fit to be your wife; indeed I am not, if you could believe it."

Claudea paused, and then she clasped her small, strong hands on Teilo's arm.

He silently unclasped them, and held her right hand in his powerful grasp.

"I see it all, Claudea. I see it as you do. Your woman's instinct goes straight to the point—the point which it has taken me a long time to reach; but, my darling, I can't give up the thought of you. The

ambition of my life has been that some day you would be proud of me when——” He broke off abruptly.

“Look at the clouds sweeping over the face of the moon, Teilo. I should be like that to you. I should dim your light. Oh, you are strong, and you speak so well. The poor will hear you, and you will do a great work. Don’t you remember how you always said you should become famous? When you were only a boy you said so. Don’t let me prevent that—because——”

“Because you don’t love me, Claudea. You love only sunshine.”

“I do love you, dear old Teilo; I love you as a brother—but the other love—it hasn’t come yet, dear. I know it hasn’t. Don’t scold me. To-day I went and told Thordis all about it, and when I was there I saw it all clearly just as I’ve told you. I saw you longing for a more exciting life than you can get here, and just pulling at the bridle that held you back. I saw that your love for me is only the old protecting feeling, but you love the higher life better. Let me be your sister. Don’t go back from your first idea. Father doesn’t hold by preaching as you Methodists hold by it, but I don’t know—I am sure you want to do them good, Teilo. You won’t be happy with only your own or my happiness.”

“It’s just because you do understand me, Claudea, that I know you ought to be my wife. You are not like Sezerina; you know what the longing for souls means.”

“Poor Teilo,” she half whispered. “Listen, dear

friend, will you wait a year and see? I shall know my own mind by then, and you will see if—the call does not mean that you must forsake all—yes, all, father, mother, and wife, for Christ's sake. You have often said that was the real meaning of Christianity."

"A year! But suppose in the meanwhile you see others, and perhaps love someone else. A year is a long time."

Claudea smiled. A weight seemed lifted from her mind; she didn't want to hurt Teilo, and yet—

"A year goes so quickly. You will go out into the country, Teilo dear, and you will, as you put it, turn many to righteousness. Oh, I know you will; and then—perhaps after that time you will see whether you even care to sit at home with me in our island farm and listen to all the sounds of the sea and the wild birds calling to each other."

"But you forget about Morgan. I have deeply repented of that exhibition of temper. It's the devil that gets the better of us at times you know, and then the fight is difficult."

"You and Morgan frightened me. Oh, promise me you won't cross his path again. I'll tell him that we are not going to get married."

"Look, Claudea, there he goes!" said Teilo, hastily, pointing out a solitary figure on the eastern side of the town.

"Why, it's strange," said the girl, smiling, "one would say that he is going towards the mill. Anyhow, Teilo dear, you can come home to supper with us, and

let the past be buried. On Christmas Day next year we shall both know our minds."

"Then I'll speak to Mr. Smallwood, Claudea, and see if he will let me work, but I must feel you will be true to me, or —"

"Why not? If I can't say 'yes' to you, Teilo, it's not because I love anyone else, only I feel we shouldn't be happy together. You wouldn't understand my longings, and I—well, I've said it all before. Let's be friends now, at all events. I wish you felt happy just to be alive, as I do. I want to open my arms wide, and take in more of the beautiful life."

"You have much to learn yet, Claudea. God does not give us this life for the enjoyment of mere happiness. He gives us pain, so that we may wish for a better world. He gives us suffering, so that the reward may be greater in the end."

"Does He, does He? but Teilo, I don't want pain, even if I am to have, as you say, a brighter crown afterwards. No, I don't. I'm not converted, I fear."

The sweet smile was lost on Teilo, and he walked hastily towards the "Mermaid."

"I'll not come in to-night," he said, holding her hand a moment as they stood in the shadow of the doorway, and saw the old village cross standing erect on its flight of stone steps and drawn out darkly against the evening sky; "I shall pray that you may be converted, dear Claudea, and then——"

"No, no, don't, Teilo. Don't ask that I may have sorrow; I want joy."



CHAPTER VI.

PAST EXPERIENCES.

“Why hast thou opened that forbidden door
From which I ever flee?
O vanished joy! O Love that art no more,
Let my vexed spirit be!”

MORGAN DEWIS went about all that winter and spring as if chained to an evil demon of jealousy and hatred. He hated Teilo because Teilo was a handsome, eloquent man, with a power of making people listen to him and respect him; further he hated him because on that Christmas Eve he had fought with him and had been overmastered by him. He hated him, too, because he loved Claudea, and Claudea had always, as Morgan thought, stolen his father's love from him. With this hatred of Teilo came the hatred of his own brother. At first it had been a poor impotent jealousy, but on that Christmas Eve Silvester had laughed at him, and the huge pile of hatred which he had been building up for years, stick by stick, injury by injury, as he deemed it, was now ready for the match to be set to it. That match had been Silvester's laughter at seeing Morgan's deplorable appearance as he shook

himself free from the mud of the pond. Silvester and Teilo were, in Morgan's estimation, from henceforth his bitter enemies, and the brooding hatred grew and grew till it filled up his whole soul. Outwardly his life at the "Mermaid" went on very uneventfully, The farm attached to the inn gave much work to both Martin Dewis and his son. He had also to see after the few stray visitors who came there, and the farmers who on Wednesdays and Saturdays always had a meal in the parlour of the "Mermaid." It was only during the long evenings that Morgan had time to nurse his evil passion and to brood over some plan of revenge. The merry, good-tempered Silvester was quite unconscious of Morgan's new hatred. His brother had always been surly and morose, so that he and Claudea had become accustomed to his short answers and ill-tempered frowns. On his side, Silvester was, of course, so much occupied on the island farm that he came over only on business, and would hurry back when that business was done. As for Claudea, she, too, led a busy life, and only very occasionally could she escape with Dumb Davy to her beloved island. Mr. Ravenscroft's wants had to be attended to. His tastes were simple, certainly, and he gave very little trouble, but Claudea never willingly waited upon him herself. A certain pride of race made her shrink from this, but it so happened that at the end of January the servant girl fell ill, and then, to spare her mother, Claudea often went up to set the table and to wait on Mr. Ravenscroft, who had now plunged

into literary work with savage ardour in order the better to drive away the image of Gina. Herbert did not like the change of attendant. He felt that Claudea waited on him with evident reluctance, and, besides, he also felt bound to be civil to her. This made him rather impatient, and several times he asked anxiously when Martha would be well enough to come back. On her side, Claudea looked upon Herbert Ravenscroft as a proud Londoner, for since that day on the island he had kept strictly to himself, and it was at last only an accident that made the two better acquainted. He had often thought of the scene near the old figurehead, but sometimes seeing Claudea tripping about on household errands or hearing her sweet voice singing some quaint song, he would wonder if Teilo were worthy of this girl, or if he at all understood her. Did she return the affection, and had she a deeper self than appeared on the surface? "She is a woman," he thought, coupling her with Gina; "she cannot be constant. Can she even love? Probably not." Men and women have been studying each other ever since the world began, but they have progressed very little in this special knowledge. "Is this primitive girl worth more than Gina, or less?" Herbert asked himself. "Has education improved upon the original stock. I doubt it."

It was a lovely February day. The sunshine was brilliant. The birds were all awakening from their winter silence, and the grass was listening to the footsteps of spring, as the author, looking up from his

work, gazed across the village street and caught a glimpse of the sparkling sea. At this moment someone knocked at the door, and Claudea entered.

"Am I disturbing you, Mr. Ravenscroft? But mother sent me to say that Silvester had come over, and that he was going back at once, and would you like to have another trip to the island? It is so fine and warm that there's hardly a ripple; so if you like we can have a long day out yonder."

Claudea's eyes sparkled, and Herbert thought he had never seen anything as charming as the happiness written so plainly on her beautiful face. Was that the answer to the problem? Woman was merely the outward manifestation of happiness. That was her only mission.

"Are you going too, Miss Claudea?"

"Yes, there is not much to do to-day. Yes, I must go. I don't seem to be quite alive if I haven't run up one of our hills at least once a month."

"That is certainly a form of home-sickness," said Herbert, smiling. "I suppose I shall suffer from it some day, and I shall want to feel the London pavements under my feet."

"Oh!" exclaimed Claudea, "but make haste, Mr. Ravenscroft; the tide does not wait for London gentlemen."

"It is such a fine warm day I shall bring some sketching materials."

"Do you paint?" said Claudea, in a voice of great admiration.

"At one time I thought I should be an artist, but there is a great gulf between the amateur artist and the professional."

Claudea disappeared without waiting to know the difference, and promising to meet Mr. Ravenscroft at the Porth, she hastened away.

Herbert felt now that the spring had indeed arrived. The very air seemed to whisper it all round him, the birds to sing it, the early snowdrops to herald forth other flowers, and the great bunches of blue hepaticas in the border of the "Mermaid" garden seemed to rejoice at the disappearance of the cold wintry days. Herbert knew his way everywhere now. He had explored many of the little porths and headlands. He had visited distant villages, and knew many of the outlying farmhouses. The solitude seemed to have done him good. The image of Gina was becoming decidedly fainter, and his literary ambition was reawakening, for soon after her desertion nothing seemed to him of any consequence. Life was one vast dreary desert, and the horizon nothing but grey clouds.

To-day, as he walked along the high road, he heard a step behind him, and noticed the figure of Morgan Dewis quickly overtaking him. He was carrying some nets, and certainly looked exceedingly gloomy. Herbert had not up to this time exchanged many words with him, but now the idea seized him that he might get some information about Claudea out of him, so as he came up Herbert joined him.

"Are you going over to the island with us?" he asked, in order to begin the conversation.

"No," replied Morgan, looking at Herbert from under his eyelids. "These nets are wanted, and my father said I was to take them down. Silvester and Claudea forgot them."

"Your sister is very clever; she seems to be able to do everything; but I expect you will be losing her some day."

Morgan looked up.

"The sooner she goes the better. Girls are slippery things; they never know their own mind."

"I fancy she has already a lover," said Herbert, smiling.

"Teilo Price, you mean. No, he'll never marry Claudea."

"Why not, if they love each other?"

"He's a Methodist. Father will never let Claudea marry a Methodist. Besides, she doesn't care about him."

"She doesn't care about him?"

"No, Claudea doesn't love anyone as much as she loves the island and father."

"But this Teilo Price cares about her?"

"He's a canting, conceited fool. He thinks everyone must do as he wishes. Even if Claudea loved him, he shouldn't marry my sister." The tone made Herbert look at his companion with a more scrutinizing look.

"Evidently you don't like him," he replied, laughing.

"No; I hate him."

Herbert was sorry he had called forth this answer.

"Surely it would be a—a very suitable marriage."

"Claudea doesn't know her own mind yet, but when she finds it out she'll stick to it like a leech. However, she has me to reckon with. She had better not make up to Teilo."

They had by this time reached the cliff, and without a word Morgan ran down the path, and Herbert saw him helping to load the boat below. Silvester was there, and Claudea was also giving a helping hand. He could see the sun lighting up her shining hair, which was simply coiled round her small head. He now looked at the girl with new feelings. She was not the promised bride of another, and she was certainly very beautiful. The liquid look in her dark eyes was very uncommon; it seemed to him as if they were formed of deep reflections. The very set of her mouth and chin spoke of determination. There was a certain power about the girl which was very attractive after Gina's soft and false sweetness. A woman who was firm and constant seemed a strange anomaly to this wearied man.

"I hope I have not kept the tide waiting?" he said, laughing, as he came up.

"No, but we must not linger any longer. Are you coming, Morgan?"

"I haven't hours to waste as you have. Another time, Silvester, you can do your own business your

self," and Morgan strode off. Claudea smiled as she saw Silvester's frowns.

"Never mind, Silvy; it's one of Morgan's bad days. Poor fellow, why does the sun never shine for him?"

"He puts it out," said Silvester, pushing the boat off.

And now Herbert resigned himself to the joy of motion. Everything was exquisitely beautiful. The sails gently swelled as the breeze kissed their white bosoms and caused the boat to sway and to dip sideways into the uprising waves. On her side, Claudea had resigned the boat to her brother and Dumb Davy, and sitting down near to Herbert they without comment continued their previous conversation.

"If I could paint," she said, "I feel that I could put down so many thoughts which now I can't find words for. Do you think the souls of some people are in a prison, and that they are always knocking at the door to be let out?" Claudea said this so simply that Herbert could not imagine she was speaking for effect. She herself was evidently conscious of the imprisoned soul.

"If you could paint, Miss Claudea, you would have to face the same difficulty, this inability to translate your feelings into suitable language. I am myself always struggling with this inadequate expression."

"I expect you don't love the things enough," said Claudea, bending over the side of the boat and letting the water caress her hand as the "Sea-gull" flew

almost silently along. Herbert felt somewhat surprised at her remark. Gina had always looked up to him—until, at least, she had become tired of looking—and here was this yeoman's daughter telling him he was wanting in reflection and affection.

"You write books," she continued, "but you have not first lived them, have you? Look at this seaweed floating close by; it is tossed about all ways because of the many currents. It doesn't know whether the Whelps or the mainland rocks will draw it backward or forward. It seems to me it's like that with people—yes, many people."

She gazed towards the steep cliff rocks of the eastern end of the island as if she were seeking for some solution of this difficult problem.

"Isn't this the fate of everybody? But I did not know before, Miss Claudea, that you were so much of a philosopher."

"I only just try and think it out," she said simply; "but since I have been at St. Castell thinking isn't so easy as it was on the island. Out there God seemed so near, but at the 'Mermaid' things are very different."

The "Sea-gull" made a sudden sweep as Silvester steered for the inside of the harbour formed by the sharp Whelps. Then all at once they sailed into the current, and the waves lashed against them and rose high in front of them like young sea-monsters at play.

"There is always troubled water here, apparently,"

said Herbert, "and yet we started on such a smooth sea."

"Teilo Price says that life is meant to be troubled. He says beautiful things when he preaches. Have you ever heard him?"

"Never; I should like to do so," said Herbert, remembering Morgan's conversation.

"I'll take you to hear him. There's a cottage meeting at Porth Slymridge to-night. We can turn in on our way home. Dumb Davy loves to go to meetings, though he can't hear a word; but I think he understands without hearing."

Claudea seemed altogether more agreeable to-day than during Herbert's first visit to the island. When they landed, Sylvester and Davy at once began to unload, whilst she took the visitor to the farm, where Betty was busy in household affairs. The island farm was a long low building. There was a large sitting-room, whose black rafters spoke of antiquity and were adorned with smoked hams. One of its windows looked towards the mainland, and the other upon the island mountain. The great open hearth had smouldering logs upon it, and there were several pictures, chiefly old prints, hung on the wall. A beautiful oak press had much old and curious china crowded upon its shelves, where also reposed a family Bible, "The Death of Abel," and Blair's "Sermons." Across the passage was the spacious kitchen, with sanded floors, and bacon flitches drying near the ceiling. The dresser was also full of old delft, which would

have made an ardent collector turn thief. The oak stairs, with a sharp angle half way up, led to the sleeping rooms, four in number, and there was much carving and a quaint fireplace to be found in each apartment. At the back, the farm buildings were crowded together and presented somewhat an untidy appearance, and that admixture of sea and land implements which added originality if not neatness to the entire homestead.

Herbert felt the fascination creeping over him as he noted Claudea and Betty quickly preparing a simple meal for him. The young girl did the honours like a queen; and when the hot tea and the home-cured ham were before them she sat down to share the lunch with him, for here she was entertaining her own guest. Herbert had often preached equality, but for the first time in his life he now experienced its real charm.

He watched Claudea pouring out the tea and cutting the home-made bread and butter with quite a new feeling of delight at such a pretty vision.

"One is always hungry here," she said, as Betty came and went between the parlour and kitchen. "If you will come with me after your luncheon I will show you a beautiful view. Other artists have taken it, but not many, for our island is not very often visited."

"You will live here, I hear, some day," said Herbert, feeling for the first time the incongruity of this thoughtful, beautiful girl living in such isolation.

"Yes, I shall live here when I am married," she

said simply, for Claudea had a certain unconventional directness of thought and speech which made Herbert feel himself a hypocrite, though he was merely conventional after the approved fashion.

"I have come here because I can't marry," he said suddenly, anxious to unburden himself.

Claudea looked at him kindly. She guessed his secret at once.

"You love someone and cannot marry her?"

"Yes—I never shall marry her, because she no longer loves me." Herbert's keen face and sad eyes belied his light tone.

"Do you—" Claudea paused at the very beginning of her question.

"Well?"

"Perhaps I ought not to ask."

"Yes, do, Miss Claudea."

"Do you love her very much?"

The words were so direct that Herbert nearly laughed at the idea of some young lady in a London drawing-room asking him this question. Besides, the very directness of it made him search his heart for the answer. Certainly he had loved Gina with all the passion of a first love.

"She had a very delicate, very highly educated mind, but—Well, I came to St. Castell to get over the feeling that life was not worth living without her."

"Is that loving a person very much? Life must seem always valuable if one really *lives*."

"If you could see her——"

"What was her name?" said Claudea, smiling.

"I have tried to forget it."

"I should like to see her and speak to her, poor thing. She is sorry now, perhaps."

Herbert gazed a little at the speaker. Claudea was becoming decidedly interesting, and she certainly said very unexpected things.

"What would you say to her?"

"Oh! I should ask her what real love is like. She has once felt it, and she knew it before it disappeared. I don't know if I love anyone really—like that, I mean. I love father and mother and Silvester, but——"

"Teilo Price?"

"Yes, and I love Teilo very, very much. I thought he would always be my brother, and he would talk to me, for he talks very beautifully. He loves good things, oh! much more than I do. At least he seems to. I can't explain it. But then—I may tell you, because you don't belong to St. Castell—Teilo is a Methodist, and we are church-people; father would not like him to marry me. Then Teilo does not love the island. He loves preaching; but isn't it odd that in spite of all his preaching he never made his sister Sezerina like chapel-going or Bible-reading in the least?"

"She got too much of a good thing," said Herbert, smiling; then he added, "but surely your father will let you marry the man of your choice?"

"Perhaps; but I have promised Teilo to wait for a year, and the weeks are going fast. I feel miserable because I don't know what I shall say to him. Teilo is so good, but—you must love very much indeed to say that sentence."

"Say what?"

"Till death us do part. You know, Mr. Ravenscroft, it must mean something very sacred and very beautiful. It must mean that you care for a man very much, and for his very thoughts and he for yours. Teilo thinks nothing of mine."

Herbert smiled at finding himself thus made into a father confessor.

"Then my advice is, Miss Claudea, at the end of the year say 'no'—or sooner, if you can."

"That is what is making me unhappy. Teilo is working so hard now among the poor. We don't meet often, he is too busy, but when we do, he seems to believe I *must* say 'yes.' Sometimes he takes possession of my will, and I feel that in the end I shall say 'yes,' and then I sob myself to sleep when I think I have done it. Teilo won't love the rocks and the sea and all the islands and the beautiful clouds as I do, and they will forsake me if I do not love them, and they won't whisper their messages any more into my ears."

Claudea rose from the table and threw open the window, drinking in the spring air as a thirsty man drinks a delicious glass of water.

"Do you know, Miss Claudea, that you are a born poet?"

Claudea turned round and smiled.

"Thank you for understanding me. I can speak to a stranger, but to no one else. I have no one here—no one."

"But don't call me a stranger any more," said Herbert gently.





CHAPTER VII.

A COTTAGE MEETING.

“ But true love never yet
Was thus constrained, it overleaps all fence ;
Like lightning, with invisible violence,
Piercing its continents.”

DORTH SLYMRIDGE has a diminutive little opening ; the river that comes from the higher tableland twists and turns till it reaches the waves, looking much like a snake sliding down into the sea. Here it makes a little rift between two rocky cliffs, and thus affords shelter for small yachts and coaling boats. Half across this entrance a former generation had thrown a diminutive pier of grey stone and sloping sides, but one stormy night the sea, indignant at the presumption of man, flung itself against the jetty and tore away the middle portion of it, leaving a desolate gap in the stonework. This should certainly have been repaired, for the jetty was very useful to the fisher-folk. A neighbouring rich man even offered the material for the rebuilding if the poor men would find the labour. It was a generous offer, but a certain spirit of *laissez faire* was strong in the district of St. Castell, and the labour was never forthcoming. So

the melancholy gap remained to rejoice the hearts of the few artists who discovered this hidden-away spot, where the tide daily proudly washed through its self-made opening, and joined the two ends of the pier by a cascade of white foam. Following the minute river up above the porth, one passed several small cottages, while opposite to them was an old lime-kiln, its white-washed tower looking cheerful among the surrounding green, and speaking of work and of refining fire in the midst of peace. The cottagers did not often walk to St. Castell. They became disinclined to exert themselves about anything beyond the necessary labour for their subsistence. They lost the enthusiasm that comes of gregarious life, and adopted strange ideas into their slow-working brains—ideas which at times became recognized by manifestations of peculiar superstitions and idiosyncrasies. It was among these fisher-folk and labourers that Teilo Price tried to inspire new religious life. He knew that it wanted many stirring words to kindle any spark of enthusiasm among them; and he knew, moreover, that neither the St. Castell clergy nor the chapel ministers had time or inclination to tramp round the country seeking for their lost or callous sheep. This evening, as the sun was slowly setting in the western sea, Teilo had gathered together a little band of the Porth Slym-ridge folk in a cottage by the kiln, and standing on a low stool, so that all might see as well as hear him, he took for his text: “Submitting ourselves wholly to His holy will and pleasure.”

The preacher's handsome face and earnest expression of countenance never failed to obtain for him at least outward attention. The most careless listeners felt that he was in earnest, for he had not much to gain by thus giving up his time and strength to such calm listeners ; therefore, they argued, he must be doing it for their sakes and for nothing else. The link that failed was, however, the wish to be any other than they were, a set of peaceable and lazy fisher-folk, going on in quietness, and quite contented with their own lot and their own ways.

“ His holy will, my friends,” said Teilo, raising his hand slowly, whilst his eyes seemed to gaze right through and beyond the wall of the little cottage, and the sound of his voice mingled with the distant booming of the incoming tide ; “ what is it ? have you ever tried to think what it means ? His holy will, so perfect, so full of purpose that even to realize it a little makes us give up every worldly advantage and leave all and follow Him. How many of us have given up, not all, but one small thing for Him ? How many of us have tried to conform to that noble purpose which created us and brought us into the world to fulfil this beautiful will ? ‘ Thy will be done,’ we say, and which of us means to do it ? Did we do it yesterday or to-day ? shall we do it to-morrow ? How many of us have offered one prayer yesterday or to-day, one real heartfelt prayer to Him who holds us in the hollow of His hand ? ”

The cottage door opened at this moment, and

Claudea and Herbert Ravenscroft squeezed themselves in and leant against the wall. The preacher's eyes at once noted the newcomers, his hand sank, and his voice sounded lower when he continued. These were his last words :

"We must give up all and follow Christ, my friends ; give up if necessary our heart's dearest wish. But let the sacrifice be a willing one ; do not keep the wish in your heart even when you give up the thing longed-for. My friends, the heart is deceitful above all things ; take away the deceit, tear away the veil that hides God from you, and when the veil is torn away, you will understand God's will and God's pleasure, and they will be yours, one with you because you are one with Christ and Christ is one with God."

Teilo stepped down from his stool, and there was a murmur of approval. The slow minds felt they had heard some eloquent words, which seemed to lull their minds to an agreeable peace. At this moment, and without taking further trouble, they were prepared to give up all and follow Christ, that is, if the way led along their ordinary daily path. They thought Teilo Price was a great preacher, and they wished to thank him heartily for his sermon.

One of the old fishermen at this moment recognized Herbert as the gentleman who had wandered one day into his cottage, so he came up to him to shake hands with him, having no views on the subject of equality or inequality, and then he began to pour into Herbert's ears an epitome of his own faith and his dread of Popery.

Claudea went from one to the other in her natural hearty manner, asking after a rheumatic leg or a sick baby, and saying nothing at all about their souls.

“Yes, Miss Claudea, it does one good to see your face,” said a pale-faced woman.

Mrs. Smallwood, the minister’s wife, always coupled the soul with the baby or the rheumatism, considerably adding to the sentiment that both were sadly troublesome units, requiring strong and unpalatable medicine, and sure sooner or later to give trouble to the possessor.

“Miss Claudea, my dear,” said another, “you didn’t hear all Teilo Price’s sermon, did you? It was beautiful, as like as possible to lavender as has been put away. You know it’s the right thing to have by you, however seldom you smell it. Lor, my dear, it’s good to hang up in the parlour—the lavender, I mean.”

Teilo now gently pushed his way through the crowd till he reached Claudea’s side, and with a sign he bade her follow him.

“So you came to listen to me, Claudea. Why is that man with you?”

“Mr. Ravenscroft has been to the island, and we came home this way. He wanted to hear you preach, Teilo, but we were late.”

“Why is he staying so long in these parts?”

“He has come to think things out. He has had sorrow. I was glad he heard you speaking about—you know, dear Teilo.”

The young preacher had slowly led the way down the path leading to the sea beside the river. The waves were washing over the broken pier, and the subdued light half illuminated the white cascade of foam. At last the two paused, for the path was now no longer visible—the rising tide was hiding it. Teilo took Claudea's hand.

"Do you see this water, Claudea? That is a likeness of my soul. There has been a path here straight and well marked, but the flood has come and hidden it. I preach to these poor deaf people, but I don't believe all I say."

"You don't believe it! Oh, Teilo!"

"At times all is dark and hidden. The grace of God will not always enlighten the darkness that at times can be felt."

"By-and-by, Teilo, it will be plain again. You have always been so good, so much in earnest. I am sure it will be plain."

There was a little silence, or rather there were no words spoken, but still the waves rolled in, hiding more and more of the path, whilst the cascade of foam poured more freely over the gap in the grey stonework. Suddenly Teilo seized Claudea's arm and dragged her back, as a huge wave broke into a miniature stream at their feet.

"If I could save you from the evil of this world as easily, dear Claudea."

The girl's beautiful face had flushed, and her hands trembled a little.

"You mistake some things," she said with an effort. "Oh, Teilo, I've been thinking about it, and now I know that you and I would never agree. You see too much blackness in God's beautiful world, and I love the sunshine. Don't let us wait till the year is out. The feeling that we are both making a mistake makes me unhappy."

Teilo's face clouded over. It was like a black rock when the white foam has run off it.

"No, I cannot let you off your promise. A year, Claudea ; you gave me a year. After that——"

Claudea turned round and began walking up the glen again.

"I must go home. Perhaps Mr. Ravenscroft has not gone yet. He will not know the shortest way to St. Castell."

"Why are you so anxious about him?"

"He is our guest, Teilo. That's all."

"By the way," remarked Teilo after a pause, during which the black cloud gradually cleared away, "have you seen much of Sezerina lately? I can't make her out."

"Well, no ; you see we are very busy at home just now, but she comes down now and then in the evening."

"Does Morgan take her home?"

"Yes, generally."

"Do you think, Claudea, that Morgan cares for my sister?"

"Cares for her? We all like her, of course. Nothing else! Morgan wouldn't really care for anyone. At

least, I hope not. His temper gets worse and worse, and Sezerina knows it very well."

"Then why does he seek her out? If he doesn't love her, he should keep away."

Claudea laughed.

"You see everything black, dear Teilo, and you who are so good, too. Look, there is Mr. Ravenscroft. Come home with us!"

"No, I'm going on to Slymridge Lane; there's a sick child there, and the walk will do me good. Good-bye, dear."

"Teilo," said Claudea, going a step towards him, "Teilo, give me back my promise. The chain is too tight. I want to be happy. Now when I go to the island I feel that the sunlight has gone, the birds do not sing for me as they did, and—don't be angry, I know it is fancy, but—Thordis is angry with me."

"You are foolish, Claudea," he answered impatiently, "very foolish. You don't know your own mind. You ought to be glad that I do, and that I love you for your own good. No, I won't give you back your word. On Christmas Eve this year you will tell me—and I know you will say 'yes.'"

Herbert came up at this moment. He had been looking all round for Claudea, and someone had at last told him she was by the river. He and Teilo looked at each other, as both proffered a slight greeting.

"The people ought to be very grateful to you, Mr. Price, for your labours among them. I have been

talking to some fishermen who seem to be very well disposed." Herbert smiled as he said this.

Teilo did not smile back.

"It is because you, as a stranger, see only the surface. I fear the souls of many of them are dying; some of them will never be awakened."

"That seems a hard doctrine."

"It is a very hard doctrine for the preacher," he answered in a low voice, "but it is a true one. I have watched the slow deathbed of many a soul hereabouts. Good evening, sir; good night, Claudea. I will tell Sezerina you wish to see her." He turned away abruptly, and Claudea, taking the lead, walked alone along the narrow river-path, whilst Herbert, following, was again struck with admiration at the beauty of her light step and the easy grace of her bearing. They did not speak for a long time; then all at once Claudea turned round and gazed at something in the distance.

"Do you see Teilo's figure on the brow of the cliff? He is going to visit that child. He is very good, very good."

"And he will make you happy, Miss Claudea."

"No," she answered slowly. "No, that cannot be; I shall never marry Teilo of my own free will."

"Then I hope you will never marry him at all. Isn't England a free land?"

"Yes, but Teilo has such power over people; even when he tells them their soul is dead they believe him. Mine will die if—if—Here is Sezerina."

Teilo's sister came running down the hill to meet them, and was soon walking arm in arm with Claudea.

"Well, you are long in coming home; I've been watching for you half an hour. Just like you, Claudea, to dawdle by the way. Now I have some real news for you. Do you remember Mr. Stanley, who lodged at the mill one summer? He's written to mother to say two lady friends of his want to find a quiet country spot, and he has suggested our house. They will come early in the summer, and they want to take all our rooms. That will give us a heap of work, won't it? but I'm glad, for I'm dull enough at home."

"What is their name?" said Claudea dreamily.

"Mr. Stanley doesn't say; but he offers us good terms. Shall you be staying long, Mr. Ravenscroft?"

"You ask a question I cannot answer," said Herbert, thinking Sezerina was wonderfully commonplace compared to Claudea. "I feel as if I must stay and go on with my sketching, unless some imperative call takes me away."

"Let's look!" and when Herbert handed his picture to Sezerina, the girl exclaimed, laughing, "It's the end of the island, and here is Claudea! Why, it's just like her, sitting down near Thordis in one of her moods."

"Is it like me?" said Claudea. "Anyhow, it's a pretty picture. We met Teilo, and heard the end of his preaching. It was very good."

"La! Teilo's got a tongue, but I'm sure I don't know what's come over him lately; he's like turned milk. There's something wrong with *his* soul, how-

ever much he talks about mine. His is a religion that turns black like silver that's put away. It doesn't suit me, and so I tell him."

"Teilo's better than most. Well, here we are at home. I hope you are not weary, Mr. Ravenscroft?"

"It has been a perfect day," said Herbert.

When he reached his own room and tried to read, he saw nothing but Claudea sailing the "Sea-gull" home in and out among the reefs and islets.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "if she will really marry that fanatic Teilo. I hope not—I hope not."

Then he paced his room for a long time plunged in deep thought.

"Why shouldn't I save her from it—why not? Gina will never love me now—never; and somehow loneliness is a dreadful thing for any man. Why not, why not?"

The old church clock struck the hour, and it seemed to say slowly, "Why not—why not?"





CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW INTEREST.

“O Time! who know’st a lenient hand to lay
Softest on sorrow’s wound, and slowly thence,
Lulling to sad repose the weary sense,
The faint pang stealest unperceived away.”

HERBERT was quite carried away by this new idea. He imagined that he would educate Claudea to a higher level, or rather that he would point out the path she should take, for he recognized that the ground was already well prepared. She had the true poetic nature, which is heaven-sent and cannot be imparted, but her gift had after all been only self-cultivated. It was so easy for him to lend her books, to put markers in the poems which Claudea was to read and to give her opinion about. It was very interesting—that was the word he used—to hear her remarks about these passages, and the interest became deeper when he found she often let fall original ideas which had not even struck him before. Herbert allowed himself to glide with the stream. He knew there might be danger ahead, but future danger veiled with a beautiful

impossibility does not often count for much, and Herbert put it completely away from him. Claudea herself seemed suddenly to have opened out like a dry tangled sea-weed set floating on a clear pool. The delicate fibres all spread themselves out and appeared to have imbibed new life. This change was so gradual that she was herself almost unconscious of it. She only knew that when she woke up there was something pleasant to look forward to. She should see Mr. Ravenscroft some time during the day—perhaps on the stairs, perhaps in the garden, sometimes by chance at one of the porths. She worked harder than ever now, so that she might have more time for reading, and perhaps her greatest happiness was to sail off to the island with Dumb Davy, taking a book in her pocket, and seeking a sheltered nook behind the rocks overlooking the birds' nurseries, there to read some stirring poetry or prose, lulled by the wind and the eternal cries of the various sea-gulls, intent on their own love-stories or nursery cares. That indeed seemed perfect happiness, marred only by the feeling that it would soon end.

One day Claudea became conscious of a change in her feelings. Always before, she had left her island with deep regret, feeling it hard to tear herself away, but now the regret seemed almost sweet. There was something on the other side of the channel which attracted her—she wanted to ask their guest the meaning of some sentence, or some line of, perhaps, Milton or

Wordsworth, for it was the poems of the Lake poet which had already before Herbert's arrival strongly attracted her. She could understand easily all the links that united him with nature, for it was these very bonds which had made her love her island solitude before the arrival of Herbert Ravenscroft, and it was also this love which had unconsciously made her feel lonely among her surroundings. She was in the truest sense a child of nature, loving it as she loved God; and blending both deep affections into one. It was Teilo's rejection of this love which had shown her that she could not willingly marry him, for if she did so it would mean receiving no sympathy for this strongest part of her nature. Such were Claudea's feelings—feelings which previously she could not express, and for which only now was she beginning to find a language—a language which books and the sympathy of a more highly educated mind were quickly giving her. Claudea's nature was at the same time her blessing and her curse, for the more man thinks the more he suffers, the more he loves the more he will grieve—such must be the tribute to be paid for all good gifts.

Another reason of Claudea's increasing happiness was the absence of Teilo. He had gone to stay at Trowford with an uncle twenty miles away, Mr. Smallwood, the minister, having given him charge of this poor little hamlet, where the resident preacher was old and infirm. Teilo's preaching was to reform the place, and though he inwardly rebelled at this

absence from St. Castell, he outwardly remained calm, and at once accepted the duty. Sezerina was glad, too, when her stern brother disappeared ; she was weaving her own little romance, and at present found it delightful. She wished to make hay whilst the sun was shining, for the visitors were coming in a fortnight, and then her mother being busy with the mill affairs, Sezerina would have to do all the waiting upon them. Gradually Claudea had seen less and less of her, not because Sezerina loved her less, but because the girl had another object for her spare time. So this quick-sighted friend never found out the dream which Claudea was dreaming so happily during these last June days, and Claudea, who did not realize it herself, because she had never loved before, would certainly not have revealed it to the chattering maiden whose volatile character had in past days often grieved her.

Neither did her parents find it out—how should they ? Claudea did her household duties as well as before, and if she escaped to the island as often as possible, she had always done so—that was nothing new. As for books, if Claudea liked reading it was a great merit in her, and showed how clever she was. Mrs. Dewis at times fancied the child did not sing about the house as much as formerly, but that, too, was natural—she had more to do at St. Castell than ever before in her life. The long and short of it was that, as Morgan said, Claudea had always been spoilt to the utmost, and her father never

allowed others to cross her will—but then Claudea had a sweet will.

It was the first day of July, and the month so often accused of shedding tears was this year heralded in by a lovely cloudless day. Claudea had dedicated it to going home. There were several good reasons why she should do so. A cow had calved, and old Betty wanted Miss Claudea to see the new arrival; more butter was also wanted, for there had been a greater number of travellers lately, and her mother had run short of the home produce. Then the tide was favourable to a long day on the island, and everything combined to make it imperative for her to go.

Claudea had to be down at Porth Caerog by ten o'clock, so she was up betimes, and when she saw Mr. Ravenscroft saunter forth, she ran up to his room and arranged his flowers. He did not guess that Claudea's deft fingers always placed these lovely nosegays in his room, and she would not have told him for the world. Then taking the last volume he had given her, a good collection of short love-poems, she took leave of her father, who was sunning himself in the porch, and hurried off, walking as lightly as if her small feet were winged.

As she walked she opened her small volume, and read softly to herself:

“Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a heaven in hell's despair.

A NEW INTEREST.

“ So sang a little clod of clay
 Trodden with the cattle’s feet ;
But a pebble of the brook
 Warbled out these metres meet :

“ Love seeketh only Self to please,
 To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another’s loss of ease,
 And builds a hell in heaven’s despite.”

She closed the book and slipped it into her pocket. What was love? and was the clod, or was the pebble right? Love should not seek to please itself; no, it was a thing divine. Teilo did not really love her; he loved himself far better. She would not love like that; no, that must be very selfish love, not the beautiful thing the poets had written about.

On the crest of the hill she saw Dumb Davy looking out for her, and as soon as he caught sight of her he ran to meet her. The simple joy of the boy made Claudea realize her new ideas. Before now, before this year, perhaps this month, she would have wanted nothing more; now she wanted the explanation of the poem. Was love selfish or unselfish? She wanted to ask the sky, and all the little flowers in the hedges, and the many birds that chirped and sang, and flew hither and thither, she wanted to ask them what love was like.

“ It’s a lovely day, Miss Claudea,” said Davy in his sign-language; “ we can run right into the landing-place this morning.”

“ And you shall have a good dinner, Davy, and fish till it is time to go home.”

They ran down the path together and began getting the boat ready, but at this moment Herbert appeared from behind the rocks which skirted the water's edge.

"I thought I heard your voices," he said, smiling. "Mayn't I come too? I want to finish a sketch out there?"

Once before Claudea had said "yes" quite happily, now she hesitated a moment as if she were shy.

"You'll find it better this side of the water than the other, Mr. Ravenscroft; the sun will suit you best here."

"No, I want the other view. Must I charter a boat for myself?"

"Oh, no, of course not; that would disgrace our house," she said, laughing. "You know the birds are on the wing now, and I must see the nurseries before they quite forsake the old cliff."

Herbert had learnt a good deal about a boat now; he could help Davy, and he begged Claudea to sit still, and only occasionally to give her advice.

"You have improved," she said, smiling. "I wish I had learnt as much from the books you lent me."

"But you have. How do you like my collection?"

"I was bringing it to enjoy it at home," and she nodded towards the island, "but when I am on the water that seems enough for me. There's beauty everywhere to-day. I wish I could get some of your London poets to come here and see—yes, just see, and then—"

"Then they might write, you think?"

"Some of them *have* seen."

Herbert smiled, hardly at what she said, but at the beauty of the girl herself. She had stuck a bunch of flowers in her dress; her hat, soft and large, was flapped back by the breeze and showed her curling hair, whilst her sweet eyes were full of thought and feeling. Her lips smiled with the smile of a Guercino's Madonna. Herbert had now made up his mind. He would ask her a question to-day—a question to which she must answer "yes." In the meantime, knowing her pride, he behaved as usual, especially as Dumb Davy's eyes were fastened upon him in the peculiarly embarrassing manner of deaf mutes. For some time Claudea's gaze was fixed on the distant view; then suddenly a flight of razor-bills flew straight close past them, their red beaks making a thin line of colour. Then came circling guillemots, or, as Claudea called them, "eligugs," by which name all the gull tribes were known at St. Castell, irrespective of varieties.

"Look, did you see, Mr. Ravenscroft, how they swept by? Down here we say they are bringing bad news when they come swiftly on the right side of the boat as they did just now." Claudea spoke quite gravely.

"What a superstitious speech, Miss Claudea. You should have lived in ancient days; though indeed the Middle Ages were not much better than the Roman times for belief in oracles and signs."

"One grows up with such things. Teilo says I am wrong, and I don't really believe it all."

"Only it influences you! Perhaps you think we may get stranded on the Whelps because this lovely flight of razor-bills flew by?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Claudea, laughing. "I shall keep off the Whelps, and I know it is silly. I know too, of course, that the birds are only skimming the water to find their dinner. Just as the 'Sea-gull' shall skim through the waves to-day."

"And many times more, I hope," he said in a low voice, but then the "Sea-gull" suddenly entered the current, and they had to tack in order to pass into the narrow opening between the rocks. They had had a splendid half-hour's sail, and Claudea laughed with happiness when they entered the port, saying, as she shook the salt drops from her brown fingers:

"Davy will see after the boat, Mr. Ravenscroft; and now that the sun shines so brightly you must come and see the gull nurseries. I'll run in and tell Betty to get our dinner ready later on. You will be content with farm fare, won't you? for Silvester now he's alone takes very little trouble about his marketing."

They began ascending the rocky ledges that served for steps up to the farm, when suddenly Claudea paused:

"Do you see this stone? It is a tombstone. Once there must have been a chapel here, and a special burying ground close to it. Here is an inscription,

but it is too much worn out to be read. I like to think that these people down below here lie so silent and quiet. They must be very happy."

"If the dead know."

"Oh, yes! of course they know. I used to think of them when I lived here, and wonder and wonder——"

Claudea's voice woke the echoes, and the lonely island seemed suddenly to recognize her voice and to rejoice, whilst the gulls circled round the farm buildings before flying back to their rocky nurseries.

The message to Betty was soon given ; then Claudea hastily went to visit the sick cow, whilst Herbert waited on the crest of the hill, and watched the incoming tide rocking the little "Sea-gull" below, as a woman rocks her nursling.

Finding that Claudea was some time away, Herbert walked up a little higher, and seating himself on a rock, he was soon lost in a reverie. Waking up after a time, he found Claudea sitting not far off, but a little higher up. Her face was buried in her hands, and she appeared to be crying. What was the matter? He took two steps, and was by her side in a moment.

"Miss Claudea, Miss Claudea, what is the matter?" for a sob was now plainly heard.

"My poor Blackstar is so ill, oh! so ill."

Herbert breathed again, it was the cow—only the cow!

"I am so sorry." His sorrow was for Claudea.

"She knew my voice at once—yes, at once—she understands all I say, and oh! she turned her large

soft eyes on me as much as to say, 'Make me well.' It was so like a human being—so like."

"I am so sorry," again repeated Herbert.

"She lies there and moans—yes, moans just as you or I might do, and Silvester says it's no use. She's taken for death. I couldn't bear it any longer, and I came away."

"Come higher up," he said gently, and took her hand as if they had been a boy and girl together. Claudea obeyed, hardly knowing or realizing it was Mr. Ravenscroft who thus led her away. Higher and higher, through the fern and heather, following a tiny path worn by the sheep. Higher and higher, till they reached Thordis, great wide-eyed, calm Thordis, who gazed ever out across the sea, and guarded her island from profane footsteps. Claudea from force of habit sat down at the foot of the figure, her head resting against the stiff folds, and Herbert sat down beside her. From this place they could see the great steep perpendicular rock, on which thousands of gulls were sitting, and round which many others flew hither and thither in continual circling lines, calling to their mates, screaming, fluttering, and all uniting in one extraordinary chorus, almost deafening to those unaccustomed to this sight and sound.

Above it all Thordis looked forth calm and passionless.

Claudea rested her elbows on her knees, and cried softly.

"She must die—she must die—and she loved me."

"Miss Claudea," he said gently, "you must be comforted. Look at all this life around you, and how soon it disappears and is replaced. Why should you be so sad about——"

Claudea stood up suddenly, and a feeling of shyness and shame at having been seen to cry overcame her. She brushed away her tears, and resting her chin on her hand she turned away from him, whilst a deep blush spread over her face.

"You can't understand. Forgive me! To you it is only a cow, but to me—I loved her." She looked up at Thordis as if she, at least, could understand her, for had she not heard all her secrets from the time she could only just toddle up to her?

To Herbert it now seemed as if he were in the presence of some superior being. If he had found Claudea in grief for the loss of a brother, it would not have had the same effect upon him as her deep sorrow for the suffering of this dumb creature. This episode seemed to take him back in imagination to early Greek days, and to a primitive life of greater union between man and his beast.

"Claudea, don't cry. Look, I meant to tell you before our return that—that you must let me comfort you. Will you? I cannot bear to see a woman's tears, and much less yours. You cry so seldom, you are not like other women. Do you understand me?" for Claudea did not move or turn towards him.

"Oh, no, no; I don't," she said, under her breath.

"How can I make you do so? You know what you

told me about Teilo? You know that you said you could never care enough for him to answer his question; well, I ask you the same question. Yes, Claudea dear, just the same. Only you don't know me as well as you know him, and you can hardly understand how——”

Claudea turned round quickly. Poor child, at that moment her eyes were opened, and she knew what love meant. The answer had been given to her, and her prayer was heard.

“Yes, yes; I can understand now—I never thought I should, but—but—you have made me understand; only——”

“Only what, sweetest?” he said softly, taking her hand.

“Only, you know, we are different, you and I. We have been brought up differently, and you know so much and I know so little.”

“Indeed, you are wrong. You have a strong, original mind, and your nature is beautiful, dearest Claudea. You have learnt so much. There is nothing you could not learn—but that is of no consequence. It's you yourself I want to love me. I want your love in exchange for mine.”

“Do you really want mine—mine?” said Claudea. “You had hers—you told me so, and she took it away. Can you want mine?”

“I do, dearest; I want yours if you will have mine.”

A lovely flush overspread the brown oval cheeks, an exquisite smile of sudden illumination transformed

her from Claudea Dewis into a young goddess—into a woman fully entering into the perfection of womanhood ; she now loved for the first time in her life.

She leant her head against Thordis, and raised one arm up to the waist of the great image as she gave Herbert her left hand.

“Yes, you have it—it is yours. I didn’t understand before, but I do now. It was that which made me so happy, and sometimes so unhappy. I can’t help it. I do love you, but I must not say ‘yes,’ you know I must not, till Christmas Eve.”

“But if we love each other, darling, what does it matter ?”

“I promised. No, I promised Teilo I would wait, and I must.”

He tried to raise the small brown hand to his lips, but she drew it back quickly.

“Oh, no!—what would Thordis think ?” Then she laughed. “You know it seems to me as if she saw and heard and understood me. She knows I said I would wait a year.”

“But we may love each other ?”

“Yes, silently. It will be a sweet secret.”

“But, darling, it is foolish to wait. A mere keeping of an empty promise.”

“I promised,” she said, and shook her head.



CHAPTER IX.

THE DEATH OF BLACKSTAR.

“For Love is lord of truth and loyalty,
Lifting himself out of the lowly dust
On golden plumes up to the purest sky.”

MISS CLAUDEA, come at once,” said Betty, when the lovers returned to the farm, “the poor thing hasn’t many minutes to live.”

Claudea turned pale, and hurried away to where Blackstar was lying on the straw of the cow-shed. Herbert followed more slowly, and when he arrived he saw the young girl kneeling down by the dying cow, and calling her many sweet and endearing names.

“Poor dear, poor dear! Oh, Betty, can’t we save her?”

“No, Miss Claudea; you know Master Silvester and me was up all night with her; nothing can save her now.”

As Claudea’s voice fell on the poor animal’s ears a faint look of recognition seemed to come into its eyes, and very slowly the tongue tried to lick the hand near to it. It was its last effort; the eyes never again

recognized anyone, and in a short time poor Blackstar was no more.

Claudea burst into tears. Her soul seemed to follow the soul of the creature she had known from its birth, and it was some time before Herbert was at all able to comfort her.

"Let's go home," she said at last. "I must tell mother; she will be very sorry, too. Silvester doesn't feel it as much as we do."

Herbert knew he could not understand it either. To him it seemed strange that Claudea should be sorrowful about anything on this happy day, but he would not for the world have said so to her. This close intimacy, he knew not what other word to use, with the dumb creatures had never appeared possible to him, unless it were a dog, or perhaps a horse, but he had been too much wrapped up in books to realize a great deal that is entirely outside literature. This link with another world of living creatures was a new revelation to him, as were also many of Claudea's thoughts. Herbert asked himself whether the girl whose beauty he loved was not in reality a being unknown to him. He reviewed his life, and saw his unsympathetic early home with an elderly aunt and a severe cousin; then his creditable college career, and his decision to find a home for himself in London. He had eight hundred a year, which his uncle, a banker, looked after, and he himself had but to draw cheques. The literary life was engrossing, and there seemed every likelihood that Herbert Ravenscroft

would live out his days as a bachelor ; but then came the meeting with the enthusiastic Gina, and for the first time the man became really interested in a woman. He was honestly in love, and honestly miserable when Gina gave him up ; but the ice had been broken, and the habit of studying a woman's character and a woman's face had made him now capable of admiring and loving Claudea. Claudea was the opposite pole to Gina ; that was why, perhaps, the disappointed man fell in love with her ; but, in truth, he had not understood either of these girls—the highly educated, fickle, fanciful Gina, or the thoughtful, wondering Claudea. He was himself not a very complex character. Literature with him was a habit, not a soul-entrancing occupation. He did not write with his life-blood ; on the contrary, he wrote well and was useful to the magazines, which always accepted his articles because they were well written, sensible, and not too original. Originality is a commodity that does not pay, and Herbert had very little of it ; but he gave his best and was contented with his share of praise.

In making an offer to Claudea he suddenly realized that he had been very original. What would his London friends say, and how would Claudea herself like London life ? The idea of permanently forsaking his old circle never crossed his mind, and indeed how should it ? Even on this first day he did not dream of making the island his future home.

Claudea had thrown herself against the cushioned

seat in the boat, and was letting Dumb Davy manage the sails. The afternoon sun was slowly going down in the far west. There was a summer haze over the distant islands, and all the mystery of loneliness was written on these desolate regions.

"Claudea, dear," he said gently; "don't be so sad —about—"

Claudea sat up and gazed on the distance. She remembered Herbert then, and a troubled expression came over her features.

"You can't understand, Mr. Ravenscroft," she said softly; "how can you? You have lived in a town all your life, whilst we have had the country, and the dumb creatures for our friends. But you will in time; oh! yes, in time you will understand it. When we live in the island you will write and paint, and be so near to the birds and all the creatures, and then you will understand them."

"When we live in the island," he repeated, thinking how beautiful she looked.

"Yes, on my wedding-day father will give it to me, you know."

Herbert was silent. He suddenly realized that Claudea expected him to live there, on this beautiful but desolate island, with its one farmhouse, and its endless sea-gulls and razor-bills. His first impulse was to say something to refute this idea, but courage failed him, and he lost his opportunity. Claudea would in the future love him for himself, and would follow him anywhere and everywhere. He had not

asked anything from her but herself, and this inheritance—this lonely island, and its still more lonely farm—were not gifts which he could very highly prize. Thus he meditated as the "Sea-gull" skimmed the waves till she reached the current, when the troubled motion began. Claudea, with her hands clasped round her knees, gazed sadly at the distance. Blackstar's death seemed too great a sorrow to be easily forgotten. Herbert noticed that Dumb Davy looked at Claudea with eyes full of the deepest sympathy, and that now and again the mute hastily brushed off a tear with the back of his hard hand. He at least could understand and share her sorrow.

All at once a sudden strong puff of wind swept by from the land. The "Sea-gull" was not prepared for it; the sail was not shifted quickly enough, and for a moment the little boat was swept onward by the strong current, dipping so completely on its side that Herbert thought every moment they must be upset. Claudea started up, and her deft fingers quickly came to the rescue, but the sudden pallor of her face spoke plainly of her fears. In a few more minutes, by tacking skilfully, they were out of danger, and Claudea was able to speak.

"How stupid I was! Will you forgive me?" she said, turning towards Herbert. "I was thinking only of Blackstar, and we might have been upset, or swept right on to one of the islands."

"Davy was not careful enough."

"Yes, indeed he was. This may happen to anyone.

I have seen a boat go down on a sea no rougher than this. Do you know, Mr. Ravenscroft, that there have been two bad signs to-day?" She smiled as she said this.

"Call me Herbert, Claudea dear."

She shook her head.

"Oh, no, no; say nothing, nothing till Christmas Eve. It must all be hidden within our hearts till then. So many wonderful things are hidden till the right time comes, and then they burst forth and delight us."

"Then don't talk of omens any more," said Herbert. "I want to think of you as far above that sort of thing. A belief in ourselves is better than twenty omens."

"Yes, much better; but to us island-people everything seems to whisper its message, and we get accustomed to listening."

They walked home together in the exquisite soft light of the summer afternoon. The shadows lengthened as they strolled along the road; the air was full of the scent of hundreds of wild flowers on thyme banks, and little birds flitted before them as if daring them to follow. A solitary hawk poised itself slowly over a field on their right hand, then swooped down upon some invisible object with the swiftness of an arrow sent forth from a strong bow. To Claudea the scene appeared new and very wonderful, for she had begun to love. Her newly awakened consciousness made all nature seem to wear a new face full of strange light, but some of her perfect freedom of mind was gone—she knew not whither.

"Then am I to say nothing, sweetheart?" he asked softly; "am I to appear deaf and dumb like Davy?"

"It is safer, better for both; suppose you change your mind?" she asked, the first fear finding an expression in these words.

"Suppose you also change yours, and find Teilo Price a better fellow than I am."

"Teilo is very, very good—I love him dearly as a brother, but he should not have cared for me like that. He ought to care only about his preaching."

"Man is human, and not yet divine. He wants some reward for his hard work."

"To forsake all and follow Christ; that is the truth Teilo preaches. Some day he will be glad that I could not love him enough, and he will thank me for not letting him draw back after he had put his hand to the plough."

They reached the crest of the hill overlooking St. Castell, and Claudea paused. She held out her hand.

"Good-bye. I must go now to John the weaver, and give him a message from Silvester."

"Let me come with you," said Herbert, gazing at the soft beauty of her face. Everything about her was made lovely by the winged Cupid.

"No, no. I would rather go alone; besides, it is out of the way, and you will like to get home."

Herbert saw that she did not want him to accompany her; so he stooped down as he took her hand, and was about to give her a kiss, but Claudea again drew back hastily—almost proudly.

"Oh! you forgot—we are only lovers."

"All the more reason. Why should you keep me at such arm's length, Claudea?"

"Not that; but a St. Castell girl does not allow herself to be kissed in a public way till all the world knows."

Before he could say anything else, she had turned away, leaving him half angry and half glad at the unusual pride and nobility of character in the girl he had chosen to be his future wife.

Claudea in the meanwhile went hastily on her way, only recovering by degrees her usual happy walk when she was out of hearing of Herbert's footsteps. She was beginning the life of expectancy, which in her case she knew must last another six months. It was a long time, but perhaps it would quickly fly away. She wanted to tell Teilo that she understood now what real love meant, but she felt it would be of no use. Teilo seldom changed his ideas, even on small matters. She must wait patiently, even if Herbert became tired of waiting, though surely that *could* not happen.

Entering a narrow lane bordered with very tall hedges, which in these parts had to serve for trees, there being but few in this country, excepting those surrounding St. Castell, Claudea fancied she heard soft voices. Usually she was quite indifferent to all passers-by, but to-day she did not want to talk, she wanted to enjoy her silence and her thoughts; so she opened a field-gate, and began walking along a narrow path on the other side, meaning to clamber over the hedge when the owners of the voices had gone by.

Suddenly she recognized the voices as they passed her. How could she mistake Sezerina's little ripple and Morgan's low, deep tones? What could they be doing here now? When they had gone by, Claudea turned back and passed out into the lane again, but this time she was behind the speakers. She could hardly believe her eyes when she saw Sezerina arm-in-arm with Morgan, and leaning her head against his shoulder as she walked close beside him.

Claudea was much astonished. What could it mean, and what could Sezerina be doing? Surely she must be out of her mind. She could not love Morgan! Soon they turned a corner, but Claudea had now made up her mind. She knew Morgan, and she knew Sezerina's weak, easily-led character. Morgan could not be in earnest—he who loved no one but himself, and who never spoke of girls with any respect. When she reached John the weaver's farm—a very small abode, called a farm by courtesy—she delivered her message, and then turned towards the lane leading to the mill. Lanes round St. Castell are quite a puzzle to the ignorant; for there is such a complicated network of these paths between hedges that it needs a clever head to remember which leads soonest, or turns less often towards the desired destination. Claudea of course knew them too well to hesitate; so quickly choosing the nearest, in twenty minutes she found herself opposite the mill. She lifted the latch of the dwelling-house, and peeped in. Mrs. Price was clearing away some tea-things.

"Why, it's you, Claudea, my dear! come in; you are quite a stranger. But, lor! child, I thought you were Sezerina. I've been expecting her for an hour. I don't know what's happened to the girl since Christmas. She's quite changed, my dear. I tell her so, but she only laughs at her old mother. I sometimes wish you were my child, Claudea."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Price; you wouldn't wish to change Sezerina."

"Well, my dear, perhaps not; but there's another way of getting my wish. There, don't blush, I don't mean any harm; but, of course, a mother's eyes can see plain enough, and I know Teilo's set on you, Claudea. There isn't such a man anywhere, though I say it. But sit down, do, my dear."

Claudea sat down dreamily, wondering about many things as she said:

"I've been out all day, and I must get home to mother, but I thought if Sezerina was here she'd come home with me."

"I know she would, if she were here, my dear; but can't you wait? It's nice to see your face again."

Claudea sat down, though she was in a hurry to get home. She listened to Mrs. Price's long grievance about her daughter with a patience helped out by only hearing half the good woman was saying.

Suddenly there was a merry laugh heard, and the door opened to let in the culprit.

"Wherever have you been, Sezerina? There's all

your work left undone, and Teilo is coming home this evening."

"I was up at Mr. Smallwood's, and his daughter wanted me. The minister is having company to-morrow—a fine set-out, I can tell you. But I am glad to see you, Claudea. One can never get a sight of you nowadays."

"I'll help you now, if you'll walk home with me," said Claudea quietly.

"It is a fine evening. I'll come now ; mother won't mind. Oh, I've had my tea, thank you, mother."

Claudea could not protest now ; she was too anxious to speak at once to her friend, and when they had got out of reach of the mill she began :

"What do you mean about being with Miss Smallwood, Sezerina ? I saw you half an hour ago walking down Thyme Lane."

Sezerina blushed scarlet.

"Were you there ? No, now ! I was coming back from the minister's house, and I met Morgan."

Claudea drew herself up to her full height, and loosed her friend's arm. She could look very stern at times, when her sense of right was injured.

"You should speak the truth to me at least, Sezerina. You and Morgan shouldn't be walking like that. You know what I mean."

"Oh, la ! there ; to take a little walk with one you've known all your life is nothing to pull a long face over." But Sezerina's cheeks became still more deeply suffused with blushes.

Claudea stopped in the narrow lane and looked at the girl, who was not pretty, but simply merry and young. Sezerina could not bear the gaze, and turned away, trying to laugh at Claudea's earnestness.

"I don't know what you can mean, dear, by this. Morgan, you know as well as I do, isn't the man to make any woman happy. Don't you remember when we were children, how much afraid we were of him ? Now Silvester is different."

"Oh, Silvester is always over yonder, and poor Morgan's dull at home, and he likes a little walk now and again with an old friend."

"Is that all, Sezerina ?" said Claudea, putting her hand on the girl's shoulder ; for Sezerina, much to her grief, was short and stout.

"What else should it be ?" and Sezerina jerked her shoulder away. "I might as well ask if that was all when you walk home with Teilo, or with this Mr. Ravenscroft. But I wouldn't annoy you, Claudea, though we all know Teilo is mad set on your marrying him."

Claudea's perfect calmness did not forsake her.

"Teilo has better work to do now than to think about such a thing as marrying. We have always been friends, and I hope we always shall be, but you know it's not that with Morgan. He wouldn't marry you, Sezerina dear, or anyone that hadn't a heap of money."

"Well, I shall have my share."

"Not as much as Morgan wants ; besides—you

know what I mean, but you won't see it. I must speak plainly, though he is my own brother. He doesn't mean anything by his just walking with you. If he marries anyone—and I hope he won't—he'll marry Kate Robins. She'll be a very rich woman some day."

"What nonsense! Kate Robins isn't here now, and as for Morgan caring for her, he has told me he doesn't."

"Then you have talked of it?"

"I don't see why you should tease me so much. I'll not go any further. Good-night, Claudea, and don't go spying on your neighbours." So saying, she tripped back without once looking round.

Claudea went sadly on. She had done no good, only she had confirmed her fears. What could be Morgan's motive? She was sure he did not care at all for Sezerina. He had never liked her as a girl, but he knew how to flatter her vanity.

She had just reached the lane that led right into St. Castell, when she found herself face to face with Teilo. He looked ill and worn, and his cheeks were thinner and paler than formerly.

"Claudea! Well, this is a pleasure!" he said quickly.
"Are you quite well?"

"Yes, but you don't look strong. You are working too hard, Teilo. Why do you do it?"

"The time is short; the day is at hand. I hear those words often ringing in my ears as I go about."

"Yes, the time is short; but, Teilo, I want to warn

you about Sezerina. You—you—shouldn't let her walk alone, and meet—with——”

“With whom?” asked Teilo, flushing up.

“With Morgan, my brother. He shouldn't make Sezerina believe he cares! Don't look angry. She must know she ought not, if she thinks, but then she so easily forgets. Teilo, just watch, and—whatever happens, don't let her marry him. Good-bye. I must run home.”

Teilo watched her out of sight, and then he groaned in spirit.

“She doesn't love me—she doesn't care yet,” he thought.





CHAPTER X.

SEZERINA.

“ Wonder it is to see, in divers minds,
How diversely love doth his pageants play,
And shows his power in variable kinds.”

TEILO now went about his duties with a new fear. He had carefully watched Sezerina's movements, and though he had not seen her and Morgan together, he felt sure she did go out to meet him. What did it mean? Mr. Price, the owner of the mill, was a grave, silent man, who never interfered with his son and daughter or their doings. He had much to do in seeing after his business. Price's mill was the only one for miles round, and his work and his prosperity were considerable. He was rather proud that Teilo should prefer preaching to working at the mill, but, in spite of this, Teilo kept all his father's accounts, and found time for his tramps round about as well. Mr. Price hoped Teilo would decide to become a minister altogether. He was willing to give him up for that, Mr. Smallwood having declared Teilo had great gifts for preaching, and that he would some day be a shining light to illumine the flock.

When Mr. Price entered his mill, his mind always reverted to money. He was rich, and he wanted to be richer. This mania absorbed all his thoughts. He was already the equal of Dewis ; he wanted to be his superior. If Martin's daughter was said to be a wife worth gaining, he wanted people to say that Teilo Price would be the richest young man in all these parts. The love of money easily becomes a madness ; and Mr. Price, instead of fighting against this madness, encouraged it. He said to himself that Sezerina should have as fine a wedding when the time came as Dewis' girl, who should not hold her head higher than his child. All these thoughts were silently matured as he worked in the big mill.

When you first enter the building, the gloom makes all the heavy machinery appear like great evil giants. There are the mighty beams, the great grindstones and the strong pillar of iron on which they turn, which can be seen descending from the cog-wheel at its junction with the axle of the huge sails. If you are not careful you may strike your head against a big lever fettered, when the mill is at rest, with a great chain, near to which the narrow stairs lead to the rest of the machinery at the top of the mill. Sometimes Teilo would go up the stairs here when the mill was not working, and opening the small door, which let in a bright shaft of light, he would stand on the platform near the four wide spreading arms. The view from this tiny platform was very beautiful, taking in a far expanse of sea

dotted with purple islands, and all the nearer coast. When they were both younger, he had often taken Claudea up here to show her how beautiful her island appeared from this spot, and Claudea had delighted in this strange resting-place. Once she had said, "Suppose, Teilo, someone set the sails in motion when we two were standing here?" Then Teilo had turned pale at the idea, and had taken Claudea's hand and drawn her inside the loft to make sure she was safe. Once on a winter's night the machinery that held the great arms had been loosed, and there had been some moments of awful suspense till the great monsters had been once more rechained.

As Teilo went about his duties, sometimes to himself he compared his love for Claudea to that wild uncontrolled motion of the sails. He had to chain it down very securely so as not to let it get the mastery over him. On one side he heard the call to go forth and preach and teach sinners, and on the other he saw Claudea as his wife, living a happy, peaceful life with him on the island farm. Love, wealth, and happiness on the one hand, and on the other the poor tramping existence of a wandering preacher—a man who had not where to lay his head, a man who was servant to all, and at the call of the meanest and poorest. This was the mental struggle that occupied the young man during these summer evenings, and now another anxiety was added to his already heavy burden. What did Morgan mean by paying attentions to Sezerina? Could he have fallen in love?

No, that seemed hardly possible. Morgan was a bad man ; there were many whispers about him, which were only whispers because old Martin Dewis was so much respected that no one liked to speak louder on the subject of Morgan's shortcomings.

Teilo went about during the next week in a state of mental disquietude very difficult to realize. He wanted to make up his mind in what manner he should let Morgan know that he would not allow any trifling with Sezerina, but Morgan was already angry with him about Claudea ; what would he say to this ? Teilo spent much time in prayer. Every day he went down to Porth Slymridge, where a poor fisherman was lying ill, and his darkened mind wanted light. When Teilo spoke of faith and love, of trust in God's mercy, he seemed to be preaching to himself, for all the time he felt that nothing was clear to his own mind. He could speak words of comfort for others, but for himself it was all dark. He was groping after a light that seemed always beyond him, always eluding his grasp. His will was, as he expressed it, struggling against God's will, and the struggle was a very hard one. He wanted to see his way clearly, and light was denied him. The summer wind that blew in all its fragrance around him brought him no comfort ; the joyous birds seemed to mock his sorrow, and only the discordant sounds of the sea-birds gave him some degree of comfort—they mingled with his cries for mercy and for pity. He was unworthy, unworthy of preaching to others, for he felt that he came very

near to being himself a castaway. His creed offered him no comfort, and he did not know where to turn for it.

One evening, it happened that he returned home much later than usual. It was dark; no moon or stars lighted his way, but he could have walked blind-fold for many miles round St. Castell without fear of losing himself. Looking up he at last caught sight of the twinkling lights of the upper portion of the village, and the sight made him think that perhaps even for him light might some day come into his desolate, darkened soul. However, turning away his mind from his own troubles, Teilo remembered the dying man he had just left. The poor fellow, whose only idea was that his life was drawing to an end, could not be roused from his apathetic indifference to the next world. The sordid cares of daily life had always filled his mind, and outside that drink had been his only recreation; and now he was going to leave sordid care and drink for what? Death came so surely, so swiftly to them all; and yet, looking round, what strange indifference most persons felt to the important subject! Whither did we go? What did God's presence mean? How could this poor ignorant man be prepared to appear before this awful presence? How could he himself be prepared?

He was slowly skirting the churchyard and climbing the hill, when he heard footsteps close beside him. The darkness was veil enough, and the two forms that brushed near to him were mere black masses;

but the voice he heard was the voice of his sister, whose chatter was hardly ever silenced.

"It's late, Morgan. I must get back ; maybe Teilo will hear me. He was to be in early to-night."

"Hush !" said Morgan's voice, and the two passed swiftly on.

Teilo's blood seemed to boil in his veins. Here at last was proof of what Claudea had said. No modest maiden would venture out even with her acknowledged lover at such an hour as this and in such darkness. St. Castell had its strict rules, and public opinion enforced them. Teilo never gave himself time for thought. He hurried on after the pair, well knowing the lanes they would choose. They would skirt the town, and pass by John the weaver's little farm, and so up to the windmill by Thyme Lane. He walked quickly on, quite sure he would overtake them ; but it so happened that Sezerina had a prejudice against Thyme Lane, for it was there that Claudea had seen her, and thus it was that Teilo missed them and reached home before his sister and Morgan came slowly up to a small back gate which usually remained unlocked for Teilo's sake, thieves being quite unknown in these parts. As the two reached the gate into the back garden, they found the tall, broad figure of Teilo standing straight before them.

"La ! Teilo," exclaimed Sezerina, laughing, "is that you ? How you made me start ! Whatever are you doing here at this time ? I forgot to tie up

Neptune to-night, and I came out to see if I could find him, and I met Morgan down the lane, and he brought me home."

"Sezerina!" said Teilo sternly, "you lie."

"How dare you say that?" muttered Morgan.

"Because it's true, and you know it is. I met you by the churchyard."

"As if we had been there!" said the girl.

"Go in, Sezerina, and do not tempt God by more untruth."

The girl crept in rebellious, but cowed. When Teilo spoke like that he was very terrible.

"Now, Morgan," continued Teilo, "you have to account with me, Sezerina's brother, for your evil deeds. Why are you trying to take away her good name?"

Morgan did not answer, and Teilo, forgetting prudence, went on :

"You don't pretend to love her, I hope. She is young and vain, but you, Morgan—you know that I, at all events, know——"

"I know you are a canting, sneaking——" In his low deep voice Morgan poured out a string of invectives, whilst Teilo clenched his right hand to help him to keep it off his enemy.

"That will do. I'm not going to be roused to fight you again," he replied; but he could have said nothing more exasperating. Morgan remembered only too well the ducking he had had, and his pride rebelled; for had he not been meaning to revenge himself for it

all along ? The very mention of it was more than he could bear.

“ Fight you. I would not touch you with a finger, a poor craven of a preacher, who fancies he is a saint and all the rest of the world sinners, and who tried to coerce my sister into promising to marry him. Why, it’s not you as she likes ; there’s another and a better man the silly girl hopes to marry, and I’ll live to see you both made fools of, you and she. There ! that’s my last word, you canting Methodist.”

Morgan turned, and walking slowly away, disappeared into the darkness, leaving Teilo standing near the gate, motionless and silent, like a figure turned to stone. The breeze blew from the sea and wafted its refreshing sweetness against his bare forehead, and all the night-sounds seemed to be proclaiming his mental agony. What had Morgan said ? —that Claudea loved another ? Who was it ? Then his mind sprang to the right conclusion. It must be that stranger—that gentleman with his sad, kindly face, and his polished manners. Such manners would attract Claudea’s poetical nature. But she had promised. No, Claudea could not break a promise ; she never had done so, even as a little girl during their games of “ I spy.” If Claudea said she would not look she never did, whilst Sezerina never could be trusted not to cheat. Ah ! it was Sezerina he ought to think about, not his own affairs. His father was a stern, silent man, engrossed in money getting. If any misfortune were likely to spoil his good name or his money getting,

Mr. Price would try and put it away from him ; he would not believe it till it was all too late. What good would there be in warning him ; no, but whatever happened his sister must have nothing more to do with Morgan, nothing. As for telling his mother, that too was impossible. She was a good, kindly woman, but never over-wise in her dealings with her children, especially with Sezerina. She let them do always as they liked, reserving the right to grumble gently, never even resenting it when son or daughter turned away unheeding of her wishes. "Young people did go their own way," she would say in excuse, and had they not done so she would have been very much puzzled how best to direct them. No, Teilo must find the necessary courage to deal with Sezerina himself. She had always minded him better than any other, because she feared him more than anyone else at home.

Pulling himself together, for he was mentally passing through a fierce furnace of thought, he walked slowly into the house. Sezerina was crouching by the great chimney ; she might have retired to bed, but she seemed chained to the spot, and as if she were fascinated by the glowing embers. She was even listening for Teilo's steps when he should come into the house. All at once he stood before her like a terrible judge.

"Sezerina, I might tell father of this, but I shall not do so. If he did anything, he would say no girl of his should behave in this way, and he might turn

you out of doors. I want to be fair to you. I can't tell what deceit you have practised on yourself or on others, but God knows, Sezerina."

"I shan't have any more chance of a little fun, so you needn't look like that, Teilo. The strangers come next week, and then I shall have to slave away all day. It's all very well for you to talk; you go about preaching and enjoying yourself."

"Enjoying myself? You little know."

"Oh, I know you're saintly, and all that; but you like it at the bottom of your heart. You choose your own duties; you don't tie yourself down to the mill-house all day as I have to do."

It was strange to hear this young girl accusing him of enjoying himself.

"You little know the weariness of the fight with Satan, child. You have never wrestled in prayer or tried to snatch a soul from his clutch."

Sezerina tossed back her sandy "widow's lock," which the wind had separated from the coil of plaits.

"Fine words butter no parsnips. I don't interfere with your pleasures, Teilo; why do you concern yourself about mine? Morgan isn't the worst fellow at St. Castell, and we—we like each other."

Teilo lost patience. He placed a heavy hand on his sister's shoulder. His voice was low and trembling.

"You know Morgan better than most of us, or you ought to do so. You know his sullen temper; but, besides that, hasn't the gossip about him reached you, girl? Would you be——"

"Don't, Teilo. I'm not one of your stupid poor people that go on listening to your preaching because they have nothing better to do. You're my brother, but I don't care to hear all you have to say against Morgan. People always will gossip about everyone. They do about you, though *you* don't hear it."

"About me—they can have nothing to say that all the world may not hear."

"Good-night, Teilo. I've settled everything with Morgan, I may as well tell you. Yes; we are going to be married in a short while."

"Did he say this?"

"Yes; of course he did."

"But, Sezerina, you can't marry him without father's consent."

"Oh, he'll give it fast enough. Morgan's share of the money will be a nice little income in the future, of course, and you and I shan't be poor."

"Very well, if you like to speak so; but remember you must not complain of after-events. I have blamed you, but you choose to shut your eyes to everything. Claudea will be sorry to know how you receive my words."

"Oh, Claudea is too much of a saint for me. It's late anyhow, now. Good-night, Teilo, and mind your own affairs."

She rose from her seat and went slowly out of the room. When she reached the doorway, she heard Teilo calling her by her pet name:

"Rina, dear, don't take it amiss. If I could tell you

or make you understand what I feel about it—how God will never forgive me if I have not done my best to set you on the right road. Rina——”

Sezerina paused half a second. Her face became very pale ; then she shut her lips closely, and without saying another word she walked upstairs.

Left alone, Teilo fell on his knees and bowed his head in deep sorrow and in great agony of soul.

“I have no influence with those who are nearest and dearest to me. I am an unprofitable servant, O Lord ! having done no good thing at all, not one good thing. That evil man has changed my shallow, affectionate little sister into another creature. Once she loved me, but now he has bewitched her. If only he means to marry her ; but oh ! my poor, silly child—even as his wife she will repent. I must save her—I must !”

Over the many islands and over the wide sea the dawn was slowly spreading when Teilo at last rose up and went slowly to bed.





CHAPTER XI.

PARTING.

“So when Love speechless is, she doth express
A depth in love, and that love bottomless.
Now since my love is tongueless, know me such,
Who speak but little, 'cause I love so much.”



LAUDEA was living in an atmosphere through which everything seemed bathed in a golden haze. The old “Mermaid,” permeated with the odour of stale tobacco, seemed too narrow for her life, though now she never entered Herbert’s room, and she never met him out except by pure accident. Her promise to Teilo seemed to prevent any free intercourse with the man she loved so deeply. But she was not unhappy. Why should she be? They were to wait only six months, and then all might be free and open as the day, and in the meanwhile she must not let evil tongues speak. Claudea had once thought nothing of gossip, but love had taught her to dread this as much for Herbert as for herself. They would blame this London gentleman if it were known he made love to a maiden of St. Castell, and Claudea shrank from even the appearance of evil. So now there were no

more happy days on the water or on the island, for Herbert Ravenscroft was no longer the stranger who must be entertained, but he was the man she loved and the man who loved her. Her innate delicacy of soul raised her far above her station, and it was this delicacy which constituted one of her great charms. It was this which made her in such deep sympathy with what was beautiful in nature.

Herbert Ravenscroft had not fully understood this in her, though unconsciously he felt it. To him she was a beautiful specimen of unspoilt nature, especially when compared with the artificial belles of a London season, but, in his own mind, he meant in the future to transform this natural specimen into a gem whose value should be increased by a costly setting. In his mind's eye he saw her dressed in the height of fashion ; not setting a sail with graceful ease, but driving down Rotten Row as the wife of Herbert Ravenscroft. He could not accept Claudea *as* Claudea, only as the seed of a future beautiful blossom that would expand into a rare and very choice hothouse flower, labelled with a new name, as coming from a fresh country—in fact, a rare importation of extraordinary merit. As to this waiting-time imposed upon him, he accepted it as one of Claudea's strange and original wishes. The very fact of his being more in love with the idea of Claudea than with the true Claudea made him patient. After the first few days, however, he began to wish to see more of her, and to talk more freely to her. Her new consciousness was a revelation of a purer soul than he

could quite fathom. A present had been given to him whose strange beauty he could not quite understand.

Anyhow, he must now think of the future. He meant to marry Claudea immediately she said "yes," and then he meant to carry her away from the country scenes and sights, which in time she must forget had ever belonged to her. He pictured to himself, as most men do picture, a very sweet little home, where he should continue his literary work, and there Claudea should look lovely, and make everything comfortable—creature comforts playing a great part in all men's visions. In Claudea he should always find a well of poetry ready to revivify his own more prosaic nature and renew his weary spirit. He would return to London, and there once more take up the broken threads of his life. He would find a small house, and furnish it, and get a charming little nest ready for his wild sea-bird:

A few days after his eventful island experience, from his window he watched Claudea going down the hill, and he determined to have an interview with her. Was she going to the church, or was she on her way to the boat? It was a fine and sunny day, but almost too late to cross, he thought. The afternoon had been hot, but now a cool breeze was rising from the sea. Taking out his sketching materials, he set out to follow her, so as to tell her of his intention, or rather a part of it, for he had not courage to own that Claudea's island could not attract him for a lifetime.

Herbert went down the thirty-nine steps into the old churchyard, looking all round him to see if he could discover traces of his love, but he saw nothing. Nor was she in the church ; for the old rheumatic clerk was dusting the seats, and he informed Herbert he was the first visitor that had looked in, "But it was a bad year for tourists, and a good job, too, for they were strange folk, and made the place so noisy."

Passing through the wide porch, he went out of the tiny gate and crossed the plank over the river, which here looked extremely picturesque, as it hurried on, overcoming the obstacles with dogged perseverance and ceaseless chatter. On and on he went, taking the road towards the Porth, but having gained the brow of the hill, he suddenly saw a tiny speck on his right hand moving quite away from the sea. That must be Claudea, and she was on her way to Carn Slymridge, now purpling gradually as the sun descended the golden steps of evening. Herbert remembered that Claudea had once pointed out some tiny white cottage at the foot of the hill as the abode of a lame girl whom she had taught to knit. She must be going there, and he hurried on after her, wishing he had started sooner.

He reached the cottage just as Claudea came out of it, and her face was full of love and joy when her eyes fell on Herbert.

She held out her hand, and blushed for pleasure.

"Did you follow me?" she said, a little reproachfully.

"I wanted to sketch," was the evasive answer.

"Then come out on the Carn. The climb is steep, but the view is very, very beautiful." They climbed in silence, Claudea leading the way, whilst Herbert followed more slowly up the rocky path, which was quite a miniature mountain climb.

At last Claudea reached the summit, and as she stood there she might have been a Greek maiden in all her simple beauty and her perfect proportion. Herbert was sure now his chosen bride was one of those rare cases of simple perfection of figure and limb not allied with blue blood.

"You have reached this height first," he said, laughing and taking her hand in his. He dared not show her greater affection.

"But we can enjoy this view together. Look at my island, Mr. Ravenscroft ; does it not proudly take the lead of all the others ? What troubles me, however, is that poor Blackstar will never eat the sweet grass there again, or lift her head to smell the sea breeze. I often wonder if, when I am dead, I shall be able to come and wander round the dear place. Our people here believe in wandering spirits, and I think there must be some who want to come and see their old haunts."

"No one knows," said Herbert. "Anyhow, we have enough to do with life, without speculating on death. Look here, dearest Claudea, I want you to know that I have made up my mind to go away on Saturday for a time—only for a time—just to settle some business

before our marriage. You have not yet repented, I suppose, even though I am kept at arm's length."

"I am finding out what love means," she said slowly, and sitting down on a large grey rock. "I know it is something very beautiful and very precious, but duty must come first, always first, I think. I owe Teilo that duty, and then after that, after that—but I don't want you to suffer. It will be better you should go, and when you come back you will find me here waiting for you."

"Do you know, Claudea, that there are many in the great world who would willingly change with you? Do you know you are very beautiful, darling, and that with a little teaching you would easily make a name?"

Claudea shook her head.

"I can do nothing but love. I love poetry because it says all that I cannot utter; but myself, I shall never do more. I shall only love all beautiful things."

"You will love me, darling?"

"You—yes; because I loved so much before I saw you—I mean, I loved all nature so much. I want others to know that pleasure. It seems that that would prevent people being mean or cruel or—foolish—only your heart might break from too much loving."

"That must be a wasted love."

"Like yours? Oh, no! yours has not been wasted. *She* must have been better for it, even if she did not

know it. ‘God is love !’ is my favourite text ; so of course He *is* all the beautiful things we see.”

Herbert was in unknown waters now. Kind and gentle by nature, religious thoughts had never been much cultivated by him, but he loved them for Claudea’s sake. It seemed to him as if he were standing by Claudea’s side opposite a fresco of Fra Angelico. Some of the perfection of art was wanting, but the perfection of artistic spirit was all over it. It raised him far above himself.

“ Claudea, dear, when I come back I shall claim you, and you shall tell me when I may call you mine to live always together, to see all the beauty of life and love together. Then there will be no more need to speak in private like this.”

Claudea’s face saddened.

“ When all is so full of happiness for myself, it seems hard that there is a shadow on other people.”

“ Of whom are you thinking, dear ?” he asked, taking her hand.

“ I am in trouble about Sezerina. I think she is making a mistake, and I must save her. Sometimes one sees so plainly, and at other times it is dark. I suppose God teaches us by light and darkness. We should not love light if we did not know the darkness. Do you see St. Castell Head ? There are old stone foundations there of very ancient dwellings. At least, Mr. Hathaway says so. Do you think people who lived so long, long ago as that thought as we do ?”

"No ; of course they did not. I am sure they did not care for beauty."

"I think they did. They must have done so."

There was a long, happy silence ; then Claudea rose.

"I must go home now. Don't come with me."

"Won't you give me one kiss, Claudea, before we go?"

"No !" said Claudea, putting her hand in Herbert's, "no ! when you kiss me I must be yours with no promise between us. A kiss is a very sacred and beautiful thing, isn't it ? When I kiss father or mother, I feel I am just owning their right to me. You see how the waves kiss that distant headland. The sea and the shore are always one with each other, always together. That sort of union frightens one a little. It is for ever."

He kissed her small brown hand, and felt like a preux chevalier. Gina had never raised such feelings in him.

"Good-bye, darling. Do you know you are the sweetest and most original of women. A man must always be influenced by such a nature as yours. What is best in him will be made more perfect by your thoughts."

"Oh, no," said Claudea ; "I'm only myself. Good-bye, good-bye. I shall try to learn so much when you are away, for your sake——"

"And you won't let me write to you ?"

Claudea shook her head.

"People would wonder too much. No, but yet—

if I want you very much—if you can help me, I shall write to you, and you will come?"

"Yes, dearest, I will come. Keep this address. It will always find me."

Claudea put it into the bosom of her dress.

"It is such a wonderful thing how you understand all that I care about. Teilo never does; he never can. Nature is all hard and cruel to him. He does not see God's love; he only sees His anger. Poor Teilo!" She waved her hand once more, and then, with a light, quick step, she descended the rocky side of Carn Slymridge, and Herbert watched her a long time walking across the fields. Once or twice she turned back and waved her hand, and once she paused a long time as if she were watching him, but she was too far off then for him to see her distinctly, and at last he turned away, and, walking to the coast, took the cliff-path back to St. Castell.

There was much regret and lamentation expressed by the worthy Dewis and his wife when Mr. Ravenscroft announced his intention of going away. He wished, however, to leave most of his books and his other possessions in their keeping, saying he was coming back before next Christmas Eve, and indeed, he said, he might run down again before the summer was over.

"You'll be always welcome, sir," said Mrs. Dewis, "and I'm sure that our Claudea will miss you. She was glad enough to get an excuse for going to the island, though last time you went there was poor

Blackstar's death, that saddened her sorely. Claudea and the dumb creatures always did seem able to speak to each other, though they were mighty fond of me and of my son Sylvester. They couldn't abide Morgan, but he never was gentle with the dumb kind, and they know it fast enough, I can tell you. Claudea's been sadder ever since then, but time will soften the sorrow. My husband says you must be born and bred on the land for animals to understand your ways and you theirs. Claudea was always one that didn't need words, and if there were more like her there would not be such a buzzing of tongues. Sezerina now, she kills sunshine with words, though she has a good heart at the bottom."

"When I come back, Mrs. Dewis, I shall expect a very hearty welcome from all my friends. You don't forget easily down here, I am sure."

"Forget! no, we never forget our friends, and there'll be a hearty welcome for you, sir, whenever you come back."

Herbert walked round to say good-bye to the people he knew. He made a point of going to the mill, but he only saw Mrs. Price and Sezerina, who were both busy getting the house ready for their expected visitors. Herbert did not take much interest in new visitors now that he was going away. He felt a little jealous of newcomers. He longed for the time when he could openly come back and claim his sea-bride, as he named her to himself, and carry her right away with him. Of course he called on the old

clergyman, Mr. Hathaway, who was more like a fossil than a human being, but full of kindness, though to Herbert he seemed far more removed from his line of thought than were the poorer folk. Herbert felt deep regret at leaving. He had grown very fond of the place. It had been a very kind nurse to him, and had lulled him into oblivion of the past ; better still, it had given him hope for the future. He had come to find forgetfulness, and he had gathered new and richer memories. Gina was becoming a distant image, blurred in his remembrance, not forgotten, but the sting of pain associated with her had been taken out by Claudea's tender fingers. With Claudea for a wife, life might have some surprises, but these could certainly never be of a disagreeable nature.

When the morning of his departure came, there was quite a stir at the "Mermaid ;" for the arrival or departure of a guest was a great event at St. Castell, the sixteen miles between that fair spot and any line of railway making the place a little republic of its own. At a very early hour the old post-chaise was wheeled into the yard, and the pair of horses that drew it were warned by very evident signs that the great journey was to be their portion upon that day. Old Jim hobbled about in great excitement, now and then exchanging anything but polite compliments with Morgan, who usually bullied him when there was no necessity to do so.

Herbert's packing-up did not take long ; but when he was quite ready, the carriage and pair were by no

means ready for him. It was during this interval that Claudea came out with her mother to speed the parting guest.

It was a beautiful summer's day, and the birds sang lustily in the trees that shaded the "Mermaid" from the summer heat and the autumn winds. For a very few minutes Herbert was alone with Claudea. She held out a tiny bunch of old-fashioned flowers to him.

"We always give the traveller who is leaving us a few flowers," she said, smiling. "They will remind you of St. Castell even when they are dead ; see, that sweetbriar will keep its smell for a long time."

"I don't need that reminder, dear," he said softly.

"No ; I know you will not." She looked up at him with her truthful dark eyes. "But one likes sweet reminders. You know that I shall be waiting for you when you come back. Whenever I sail to the island, I shall think you are by my side, as you were the other day. But when the birds go they will take some of my beautiful picture away with them."

"But remember they will come back, though the island must be very silent without them."

"They come in October again, on their way to warmer lands. I believe they know we love them, and that we are looking for their coming again."

"You will not get rid of me as easily when I do come back, Claudea."

"Hush ! Here is Morgan, and father is with him."

The whole family surrounded the lumbering chaise when at last Jim drove it out from the yard, and in

the babel of tongues Claudea's silence was not noticed. Among all the waving of hands no one saw her press her finger-tips and send her first kiss to her lover, and when the post-chaise and Jim and Mr. Ravenscroft had disappeared round the corner, no one noticed Claudea turn indoors, and no one saw her brush away a few tears that, in spite of herself, would gather in her eyes.

"He will come back," she said, "and I shall be here to welcome him, even if everyone else has forgotten him."

Then her old, uneventful life began again.





CHAPTER XII.

CITY AND SEA.

“While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.”

MY dear Aunt May, this is the most delightful place in the world, and this mill is romance itself! That dear old general was a true prophet when he said I should feel at once at home among this idyllic people and this exquisite scenery.” Thus spoke the Hon. Georgina Ashton.

“You speak, Gina, as if you had never travelled in Italy and elsewhere.”

“Yes; but I know nothing of my own country. This morning I wandered down to the cliff, and everywhere the views were delicious. The islands seemed to be floating on the bosom of the ocean.”

“But they were, however, fixtures, we know. I wish, Gina, you could look at reality sometimes.”

Miss Medlicott was not sentimental, and for this reason, perhaps, and by way of contrast, Gina had been always in her good books. She admired her

niece's pretty daintiness, being herself very plain and awkward.

"Reality has yet to be defined. How do we know what reality means?"

"Why, that those islands are not floating about, but pretty well rooted, I hope. I only wish your inclinations were the same, dear."

Tears gathered in Gina's blue eyes.

"Oh, Aunt May, how can you? Was it my fault this time? Lionel found another harmony; his keynote changed."

Gina said this gravely. She did not see the twinkle in her aunt's eyes.

"You threw over that charming young Ravenscroft because—really, I forget why. You behaved very badly, and this want of harmony in your next inclination serves you right. You will die an old maid, and what a sentimental old thing you will be, Gina. Not at all like the Medlicotts."

"Oh, I hope not! As long as I live at least let me keep some ideals. You have none, Aunt May!"

"I am none the worse for that. I can eat my meals comfortably, and, because I couldn't marry the man I loved when I was young, I am now an old maid, and a very happy one, too."

"No, Aunt May, only those who live in the ideal know true happiness. Yours is a negative kind of joy, which I do not wish to possess. But I have already found an ideal here in this out-of-the-way corner of the world."

Miss Medlicott upset the salt she was carrying to her plate.

"Good gracious, Gina, you don't really mean to say that you have already picked up another ideal!"

"A beautiful ideal. I have never seen such a perfect picture. You know my sketches have been admired. Poor Herbert used to admire them very much. He said they were full of poetry. Well, I shall sketch this ideal."

"A fisherman? Anyhow, I hope there is no new heart to break."

"It is a woman! The most beautiful girl I have ever seen. I will tell you how I came to discover her. I wanted to take a long walk, but I seldom can walk as far as my wishes would carry me; so I asked this buxom Sezerina—what a barbarous name!—how to get a carriage so as to drive to the shore. She said John the weaver's boy had a donkey-trap, and that he would drive me down to the Lifeboat Porth. I accepted; but, indeed, it was not an ideal donkey. It shied at everything, even its own reflection, and it didn't go as fast as a snail. However, we got there at last, and I was glad to get out and walk down to the shore. Imagine, Aunty dear, my surprise at finding a lovely little bay—oh, so lovely!—Then, on the tiny landing-place, my exquisite ideal was standing, helping a deaf-and-dumb boy to get a boat off. I gazed at her a long time quite spell-bound, and then I saw her step into the boat and sail away. She was a poem in herself. I asked the donkey-boy all about

her, but this was all I could get out of him : 'That's Miss Claudea !' (Think of that pretty pronunciation!—isn't it perfect?) 'She lives at the "Mermaid," as Mr. Martin Dewis has taken on.' "

"Well, my dear Gina, an innkeeper's daughter is not a very romantic subject to choose for your ecstatic admiration. It sounds better in a book than it is in reality."

"You shall see. In the meanwhile I am so much charmed with this place that I shall renounce all London society, and if possible end my days at St. Castell."

"Then your father will certainly be surprised at your decision ; and, if I am to be your companion, my dear Gina, I hope your days will not be long in the land."

Aunt and niece never expected their wishes to dovetail ; so they never lost their tempers at the frequent opposition which usually met one or the other of them. Besides, Gina was really clever as well as æsthetic, and if she could have fluttered long enough over one flower to have extracted its honey, she would have been a well-laden bee. As it was, though her journeys into the flower gardens were many, she seldom brought home much useful spoil. Her personal appearance was very fascinating, especially to men. She was very fair, very pretty, and very womanly. Her clinging disposition flattered those who did not know she had sought the support of many others, and would in the future cling to many more, unless some

one personality could impress her enough to stay her many flights of fancy on the wing. Gina's last fancy having ended disastrously, she had made herself ill with worrying, and the London physician, who had not time to attend to such cases, had recommended change of air without excitement; and thus it happened that St. Castell had been chosen for her by an old friend as the most out-of-the-way place in the world.

Gina Ashton would have been almost content to live a little while without an ideal, but fate had determined otherwise. The July days were "perfect," the old church "quite romantic," the cliff walk "too heavenly." The sketching was "enchanting," and now she had seen Claudea! Of course, Miss Medlicott did not believe her; so Gina waited impatiently for the next opportunity of showing her aunt "the ideal innkeeper's daughter," as Miss Medlicott ironically named her.

Therefore, when next Sezerina made her appearance, the impressionable Gina began to question her closely about Claudea.

But Sezerina had lost some of her girlish happiness. She still smiled and chattered, but her ringing laugh was not heard about the house. Something was changed about her, and the sunlight did not seem to her the glorious thing it had once been. Of course the strangers knew nothing of this. To them Sezerina appeared to be a buxom country-girl of the better class, and with more love of finery than taste to know how to wear it.

"Was it Claudea you saw! She is my friend; we were playfellows, but now she holds herself very high," and Sezerina tossed her head. Gina thought, "No wonder she does if she compares herself with Sezerina."

"Would she take us in her boat?" said Gina, thinking of no other way of forming an acquaintance.

"Well, I'll ask her. Claudea mostly does things she's asked to do."

That same evening, when a dim crimson was spreading over the far west, against which the islands and the line of jagged carns were drawn as if with a brush dipped in cerulean blue, Sezerina ran down the lane from the mill in order to find Claudea at the "Mermaid." Claudea was picking some peaches, and as she placed them carefully in a basket she might have been some Vestal, gathering early fruit for the offerings in the temple.

"I'm glad I've found you," said Sezerina, walking down the path by the southern wall against which the peach-house was placed. "It is seldom we meet now." Sezerina's voice was sad, even though her laugh was as loud as usual.

"I was just coming to the mill with this basket of peaches, Rina dear. I know when you have visitors little gifts please them. How busy you must have been! If you want a helping hand, you know we have no one now staying here, and I could come and help you."

"Oh, I can manage, thank you. But the two ladies

want you to row them in your boat. They want to see the island. Are the birds gone yet?"

"They will soon be on the wing, but a few always stay behind for a time. What are your ladies like, Rina? They might be nervous with me."

"One is the prettiest fairy imaginable, Claudea. Do all I can I couldn't get my dresses to fit like hers."

Claudea laughed.

"Then don't try. Our own clothes are much more convenient. How could I boat in a long train or in a velvet gown? I don't expect your lady knows how happy one is on the water in a dress that cannot be hurt if a wave just washes in to greet you, or if the rocks tug your petticoat as you pass. But I'm ready; I'll walk back with you."

Sezerina hesitated a little.

"Claudea, where's Morgan?"

Claudea's lips no longer smiled.

"Morgan went to Freshbay this morning. He'll be out all day."

"He's really gone?"

"Yes. Do I ever invent news?"

"No, Claudea; but Teilo's coming back the same way to-night. I hope they'll not meet. Teilo's angry with him."

"It's your fault, Rina. Why don't you give up such ways? Morgan's not one you should encourage as you do."

Sezerina burst into tears.

"It's all very well of you, Claudea, to talk like that ; but there's Teilo ready to be your slave, and you are so cold and indifferent to everyone. I'm not like you ; but Morgan isn't the same now."

"How the same?"

"Since the night Teilo and he had words about me, Morgan won't come near me."

"I'm glad of that. I expect Teilo made him see it wasn't right."

"Glad!—Oh, Claudea!" and Sezerina's face seemed to change.

"Yes ; you see he didn't mean anything, and you should be glad, too, that your silly fancy will be stopped. It's no use running after a man that's—that's like Morgan."

"Claudea, you're good ; you don't understand. I wish—I wish I'd told you all about it at first ; but now I'm—so unhappy."

"Wait till the season's over, and then go and stay with your cousin, Rina dear. You can't really *care* about Morgan ; you know what people say—and—I don't ever listen because he's my brother, but for your sake, Rina, I did warn you."

"Yes, I know. Well, I must go back. Come with me. They want to see you."

The two girls walked across the road, and down the narrow lane full of the perfume of wild flowers. At first they were silent, and then Claudea said :

"When Blackstar died, I seemed to understand some of the pain of all dumb creatures. It's just like

that with us and God. We are dumb ; but if we look up to Him, then He understands."

"Oh, I'm not religious ! Teilo talks like that. Besides, besides—Never mind, Claudea, I'm cross, you know, and hasty ; but you did do your best for me. I'll say that."

"You know I'll do all I can for you, but now do—do be warned. Don't have anything more to do with Morgan. It's not too late yet."

"He said he—he cared," said Sezerina, looking absently at the great arms of the windmill drawn out against a green-tinted eastern sky, in the depth of which a few stars were faintly appearing ; "and no one else ever came courting me."

Claudea did not seem to hear this remark, and having reached the gate, Sezerina led the way upstairs into the sitting-room of the two ladies. From their windows could be seen the not far-distant sea, but there were only a few islands visible from this spot, some out-buildings coming in the way and hiding part of the view.

Gina Ashton was sketching from the window, trying to get some of the purple and gold of nature into her picture. Her aunt was reading aloud to her, when Sezerina announced Claudea, and then retreated hastily.

Claudea, in her large straw hat and simple skirt and jersey, which showed off her exquisite figure to perfection, stood for a moment in the doorway silent, not from shyness—she was too simple to be

very shy—but struck with admiration for the fairy-like prettiness of the young lady before her. The gold hair fluffed and rolled round a pretty head; the large blue eyes, always looking up and searching for some new satisfaction—all these signs of the confiding child appealed to Claudea's protecting womanhood. She did not realize, in the least, how far more really beautiful she herself was, with no help from art or from dressmakers.

Gina, on the contrary, recognized this at once, and even Miss Medlicott, usually scornful of her niece's new discoveries, felt that the girl before her was a lady in the truest sense of the word. It was impossible to patronize her; but it was also rather difficult to know how to receive this strange new type of beautiful and unconventional girlhood. Gina was under no such difficulty. She started up, and came forward to shake hands, as if she had known this ideal all her life.

"Miss Price has told us that you would forgive us if we inquired about the boat. I saw you sailing yesterday, and I thought it delightful to see you manage it so beautifully. Now, if you would be so very kind—"

"In a few words," put in Miss Medlicott, "my niece wants to say that if you would take us to your island, it would be really a charming expedition."

"I will, gladly," said Claudea, lifting her head a little, and giving the fairy one of her beautiful smiles. "Did Sezerina call it my island? It belongs to my

father, of course ; but I was born there, and it is to be mine some day."

"How romantic !" exclaimed Gina, bringing a chair forward for Claudea. "Won't you sit down and tell us the names of all the islands we can see ? Fancy owning one of them ! I should be so happy if I possessed even the tiniest of them, and if I could live there for ever. Oh, Aunt May, that sounds so perfect."

"It sounds so. You forget the reality, Gina."

Claudea turned her dark eyes (Gina said afterwards that the light of evening was permanently in them) towards the vision of fair hair, and with a little motion of her hand, she exclaimed, suddenly drawn out by the friendliness of the young lady :

"If it sounds beautiful, you, who have not tried it, cannot really understand how beautiful it is to live there, to hear the waves always speaking, always saying something grand. In winter they tell you of battles and the fight of old warriors, men like those who are carved in stone down there in our old church, but in summer-time the waves whisper about good deeds and love, and little children playing with pebbles. But then the birds—they are not yet gone. You will see some of them if you will come to-morrow."

"Indeed, Miss Claudea," said Miss Medlicott, smiling ; "you will make my niece more foolishly romantic than she is already."

"You see, Aunt May, I was right. I have found a kindred spirit."

"Not at all, Gina ; you have found a real lover of loneliness, which you never were, and never will be. You always want someone to listen to your rhapsodies."

Claudea laughed—her laugh was musical, having never been raised above the voice of the sea, for sea-folk know that is an impossibility.

"The tide will be right for one o'clock to-morrow ; so we can spend a good afternoon there, and the evening will be calm, I think. Look at the red glory over the west."

"Some day," said Gina, when Claudea rose to go, "you really must let me make a sketch of you, standing by your boat, just as I saw you yesterday."

"If you like ; but I can show you much more beautiful sketches from the island. An artist has lately been painting them."

"Where is he ? I love artists."

"He is gone. He was not a real artist ; but he loved it."

"What a pity he has gone ! Oh, must you be going ? Thank you ; I am longing for to-morrow."

Claudea went out into the evening air, with a smile still playing upon her lips. Would Herbert have liked this pretty girl with blue eyes ? she thought. But now he was gone, and the place seemed very desolate without him. She leant her elbows on the garden gate, and gazed at the familiar beauty all round her. Some yellowhammers fluttered near to her before going to rest, and one redbreast, recalling

winter, flew up into a stunted thorn-tree to sing its last evening song.

“That girl is very pretty, but how can she know what it is to love the country? She is a town-girl, and she cannot understand.”





CHAPTER XIII. WITH THE "SEA-GULL."

" Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy."

EILO EILO was coming up the lane just as Claudea was walking home, so that they met in the deepening purple of this summer's evening. It was some time since they had done so, and seeing Claudea's graceful figure standing out against the chrysolite sky, with two great black arms of the windmill in the background, the preacher's heart beat fast. The very presence of this woman made him feel how weak were his struggles against his strong love. She had always been able to raise his intellectual level, but he never seemed able to approach her moral standpoint. He strove for simplicity in his religion, and failed to attain it, always striving as it were with the angel of God without prevailing.

" Claudea!" he said in a low voice, " Claudea, why have you avoided me lately? If you are never to speak to me, how shall I make you understand——?"

"It's not the understanding that you were waiting for," said Claudea, leaning her back against the gate. "You were waiting to see if the call came to you with greater power. But I'm glad to speak now, Teilo. I want to tell you that when you ask me on Christmas Eve my answer will be 'no.'"

"Don't!" said Teilo impatiently; "then it's true, Claudea, you love another—They have told me so."

Claudea felt the warm blood spreading over her cheeks as water covers the smooth sand, but the shades hid this tell-tale witness.

"I have always been—true to you; I have always said I should love you as a brother; I said I would wait till Christmas Eve, not knowing—but I shall be true to my promise; I will not give anyone the right to—"

"Then it's true," repeated Teilo. "Let me show you what you are doing, Claudea. Don't I know you better than anyone else? You will marry this stranger, and he will take you away from here, and then you will hear all the old voices of your youth calling for you, and they will drag you back, or you will die—I know you better than—"

Claudea bit her lip.

"You know this, and yet you once said that you must go and preach far away from my island, and that you must obey a higher call. Did I want to keep you back? The man who loves me will love my home. But, dear Teilo, don't let us hurt each other;

try to forget me. You will then give all your mind and your heart to God's work, and isn't that infinitely better than possessing human love?"

There was a pause. A brown owl fluttered out of a stunted yew-tree in the mill garden, and a bat brushed past Teilo with eerie swiftness.

"I can't—I can't give you up. I know you don't love me; I know the smoothness and the fair words of the stranger have taken your fancy; perhaps he thinks he loves you. Well, it isn't difficult to love you, dear; but he can't understand, how can he? What does he know of your life, or of the things you love most? He was bred in the town, and has no heart to understand. The flame only fed with dry sticks soon burns out, but the fire that has smouldered in a beam of oak will burn for years. No, Claudea, for your own sake, I must keep you to your promise, and on Christmas Eve you shall say 'yes' to me. Till then—give me your hand once more. It's the sight of you now and again that makes me able to keep on. The indifference of those poor men is a heavy burden to carry about with you. If I believed you would feel as I do, and that you would help me in the work, do you think it would be difficult? It would be child's play then. I would make them see their folly, and they should lead more godly lives, but now it's a heavy burden, a very heavy burden, I carry."

"But Christ said, 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.' Oh, it's love, just loving people that would make it easy; but I think there are some who love

themselves most. Mr. Tramerin never wears a sad face, and yet he works hard."

"Your curate doesn't feel the burden of souls. You are hedged in with forms and ceremonies; you can't speak straight out of your heart as we can."

"I like the old words best, they are like the song of the blackbird or the robin. I shouldn't like them to change every year, nor the flowers to have a new scent, even if it were a sweeter one. But indeed, Teilo; I must not stop any more. I've been to see Sezerina's visitors. They want me to row them over to the island to-morrow, and that you know is a pleasant task for me. We shall be going at one o'clock. Good-night, and don't come with me."

She held out her hand, and then walked hastily away without looking back. For her the beauty of the evening had faded, and the reason of this was Teilo's remark about the stranger. She tried to put the thought aside, but it came back again. As she neared the village cross she noticed Morgan coming up the hill, and then she remembered with thankfulness that Teilo was by this time indoors, and that the two could not have met on the road. She was standing at a corner of a projecting house, and not wishing to meet her brother, she paused a moment to let him precede her. As she waited she saw him turn up a lane opposite the cross, and then she was surprised to see another figure join him. Her heart leapt into her mouth. Was it Sezerina? If so, she must have run out of a back door whilst she and

Teilo were talking. Claudea dared not follow them ; so she merely went quickly up the street till she reached the "Mermaid."

Martin Dewis was at the door, smoking his pipe and enjoying the warm evening air.

"Well, my dear, where have you been ? Sylvester's come over, and he and mother are talking. I'm waiting for Morgan. There's Joe Jones declares the horse we sold him last week isn't sound. My belief is he put him into that damp stable, and he's just developed the thrush in his forefeet, but as to being sound—Morgan had better give him a bit of his mind. Morgan is later than usual. I don't know what's come over him lately. He's that glum, it's enough to turn the milk sour."

Claudea put her arm into her father's, and stood there beside him. Martin Dewis glanced at her with a feeling of pride. There was no girl at St. Castell that came anywhere near to his girl, and no one but himself knew the snug dower he was saving up for her. Claudea should marry the man she pleased, except—Well, the other day Morgan had muttered something about Teilo making up to Claudea. No, Teilo was too gloomy, too much of a Methody, to be Claudea's husband. Martin always had been a Churchman, and looked down on the Methodists with supreme contempt. However, at the bottom of his heart Martin knew that if Claudea chose to marry Teilo he would never have the heart to say "no" for very long ; but Dewis understood his girl better than

to have much fear on this subject. "She wants sunshine, not a storm-cloud, always going about with her," he had one day remarked to his wife.

"Morgan may say more to Jones than you mean him to say, father," answered Claudea, smiling a little, though her heart seemed heavy. "Why don't you see the man yourself? You never make people angry."

Martin Dewis laughed. To be praised by Claudea was joy to his heart.

"Well, I'll see about it. Morgan is certainly free with his tongue when his temper's up. There's something wrong with him. No one would say he was a child of mine, eh, Claudea?—not like you and Silvester. Nature works awry at times, no doubt about it."

"There's something wrong about the weather for to-morrow, I should say. Look, father, at that low cloud in the east. It's strange, isn't it?"

"A little thunder-cloud, that's all, child. It's been over hot this week. Let's come in to supper. Silvester's brought us the finest lobster I've seen this many a long day."

The evening meal was always a cheerful one at the "Mermaid," especially if Morgan was not present, as was fortunately the case this evening. Martin was full of talk about the island farm, comparing it with the one on the mainland, and sheep was a subject of which the men never grew tired.

Claudea entertained her mother with a description of the newcomers, and then Silvester was told to make Betty prepare a befitting tea when the ladies should

arrive, for hospitality was a sacred duty at the farm. At last, when Claudea was alone in her room, she threw open her lattice window which looked towards the islands, now all blotted out in blurred dimness. The warm night air was wafted towards her laden with sea salt and full of mysterious calm. It gently blew in, and waved the stray dark curls which nestled over Claudea's forehead. Then her heart seemed to leap for joy as she took down a volume of poems Herbert had given her. The very touch of the book brought back the sound of his voice and the echo of the words he had spoken, especially the words he had spoken to her on the island. The new joy of this strange love, this love that was higher and better than anything she had ever possessed, thrilled through her, and seemed to raise her into another Claudea. True, Teilo had spoken against this new affection, but his words did not trouble her over much. She was sure Herbert meant what he said, and if he loved her he could not intend to take her away. He had told her how the world had deceived him, and how here in St. Castell he had found a new peace and a new joy. Here he should always have leisure for writing his thoughts, and his recreation should be painting the beauty so lavishly scattered around him. He would read and explain beautiful poems to her, and then on summer evenings they should step into the dear "Sea-gull," and sail away towards the west till darkness brought them back to what Herbert had once called "The Island of the Blest." This was the

picture which Claudea saw so clearly in a mental vision — a vision which satisfied her, and made her kneel down and thank God that He had given her so much happiness. To her God appeared so good, so gracious ; He was not at all like Teilo's God, who was always calling for vengeance on the sons of men. Claudea would have liked to go to Teilo's poor ignorant fisher-folk and tell them the Son of God had come to give them love, and to ask them for their love again ; she would have assured them that He loved every living thing on earth, and all the creatures in the sea, and all those dear wild sea-birds who sought and found shelter on Claudea's island during their nesting-time.

At last she closed the window and went to bed. All night she seemed to dream that Herbert was with her. They were on the island, and roses covered the porch of the old farmhouse, and she and he picked them one by one till the tree was bare. Then she looked up at him and said, "It seems a pity we have picked them all ;" but he laughingly answered, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may ;" and Claudea in her dream remembered this was only a poem, and she wished so much she had not picked them all, every one of them, and she mourned a little, till Herbert kissed her tears away, and she remembered no more.

When she awoke she remembered the visitors ; but the vision haunted her, and she still felt grieved about the roses, till, having much to do before she ran down to the Porth, she gradually forgot her dreams in the present reality.

It was a very hot, oppressive day. The sea looked sullen, as if it were nursing angry feelings, and, as she and Dumb Davy busied themselves to see that all was right with the "Sea-gull," Claudea questioned the boy as to the clouds which were low down in the northern horizon.

"Will the day last out fine, Davy? It is strangely oppressive."

"There'll be trouble to-morrow," was the answer; "but we can get over easily, even if it comes earlier."

"We shall have ladies, Davy. They may be afraid."

Davy shrugged his shoulders in utter contempt of ladies who had nerves. His lady was never afraid!

At this moment Miss Ashton and Miss Medlicott appeared. Gina was arrayed in the prettiest blue dress imaginable, and her attire was perfected by a coquettish blue sailor hat. Claudea smiled her welcome and her silent admiration, as she remarked,

"We are quite ready for you. Let me help you in."

She said nothing more just then, for she was anxious to steer clear of the Whelps, and to time her arrival at the island with the turn of the tide. There was a decided swell to-day, though no large waves were formed near land. Gina leant back against the cushion, and feasted her eyes on the sight of Claudea. She was quite in love with this ideal picture, and with the girl's graceful motions. Her own failures in life had disgusted her with the past, this present seemed now exactly the right thing for her happiness. She must have been waiting for it, so she said to her aunt.

When they rounded the Whelps and safely grounded on the tiny beach, she expressed her sentiments to Claudea :

"This is really too beautiful! I must live at St. Castell always. I never wish to leave it! 'Far from the madding crowd,' isn't it, Aunt May? Then these islands, and this one which belongs to you—Sezerina has told us the romantic story about it—it is to be your wedding present! I must be your bridesmaid. It would be so original. What a pretty old farmhouse up there! and, Aunt May, look at the cliffs, and what myriads of birds—some fly singly, some in little companies. I wish I knew all about birds. Let's go at once to the bird-cliff."

Claudea led the way. The fern stood high now, and the heather and gorse were thick and difficult to pass through. Occasionally the thrift conquered the grass, and made a carpet of pincushion-like tufts, over which grey rabbits scampered away at the sight of strangers. Gina herself looked like a tiny blue butterfly, as she hovered over this or that wild flower, wishing to pick everything she saw. Of course they paused near Thordis, at whose base Miss Medlicott sank down, overpowered by the heat of the sun.

"Thordis will shelter you," said Claudea, turning to the elder lady. "She has often sheltered me from the wind and the rain."

The figure of "Thordis" quite made up the sum of Gina's happiness, and she exclaimed,

"Such a nice Scandinavian name—and what great

storms she has seen! What men she has inspired! Did your artist try to draw her, Miss Claudea? If not, I must make a sketch of her. Perhaps I shall be the first who has thought of doing such a thing."

"The artist only sat near her," said Claudea, smiling at the recollection. "Perhaps when he comes again he will draw her. Come and see the few birds that remain."

She led them to the edge of the cliff on the western side of the island, and here Gina found no words to express her wonder at the sight before her—the roar of the surf against the perpendicular rock, mingled with the shrill cries of birds, and their ceaseless flight from, and their return to the rock. But a little way from the cliff Claudea pointed out some smaller birds swimming hither and thither in the water, diving for small fish, and quarrelling fiercely among each other.

"They sound more like cats squalling than birds," said Claudea. "Those are stormy petrels. They come here usually before a storm. Do you see how sullen the sea looks? and yet I love it in all its looks."

"Come away, Gina, the sight makes one giddy. Nature is not soothing in this spot," said Miss Medlicott.

Then Claudea laughed, and led them away from the edge to more smiling nature. The haze of heat was over the distance, but some of the islands looked like chips of old copper edged with white foam.

"We must not linger long after tea," said Claudea, pointing out and naming the islands and the headlands. "I do not like the look of the sky."

"We are not afraid of the sea," said Miss Medlicott. "It is such a short crossing."

At that instant there was a sudden noise at their feet, and a great bird extended its white and brown wings and flew away before them.

"Look, look, what is it?" asked Gina. "Is it an owl?"

"Oh, no," said Claudea, turning pale, "that is a buzzard. We have them here occasionally, and the poor folk say it is a sign of bad luck; but there is no such thing as luck, Mr. Hathaway says. That is a heathenish thought. Our poor people are like children; they like stories and legends, and they see luck and ill-luck in many things."

"My aunt hasn't one superstition, but I assure you, Miss Claudea, that I have very many. I never allow blackthorn to be brought into the house, and—but look! who is waving to us?"

"It is my brother; we must come home," said Claudea, turning back. They retraced their steps, and found that a beautiful tea was spread out for them in the old parlour. Gina admired everything, not least of all Silvester's tall handsome figure, and the gentlemanly manners that distinguished him. One could see he was Claudea's brother.

"You must not linger very long to-day, ladies," he said. "The sea is beginning to lash itself into an

angry mood. "Will you like me to go with you?" he said, turning towards his sister.

"Oh, no. You wouldn't get back if a storm really comes on. I'll take the 'Sea-gull' straight through the opening in the Whelps."

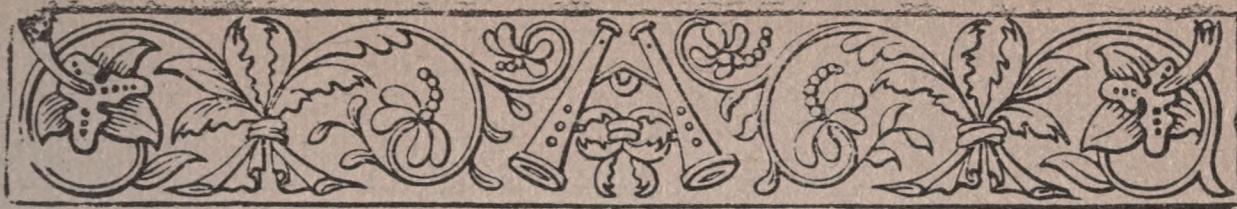
"May I come again, Miss Claudea?" said Gina, as they stepped down the rude rocky stairs, "and will you come and see us very often at the mill?"

Claudea smiled as she and Sylvester helped the ladies into the rocking "Sea-gull." "We always try to do what gives our visitors pleasure; but if you have the rocks and the sea, you want nothing else," she said simply.

"Make haste, Claudea," said her brother, "I can smell the storm."

In a few minutes the "Sea-gull" appeared to those on land to dart forward out of the smooth water and then valiantly to battle with the waves.





CHAPTER XIV.

MISTAKEN IDEALS.

“Wait, and Love himself will bring
The drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit
Of wisdom. Wait, my faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end.”

GINA looked radiantly happy as she sat down on a chair inside Dumb Davy's home, but her aunt leant back faint and pale. The crossing had been very rough, and had considerably frightened the poor lady. Indeed, there had been some danger, for the wind had hindered them at starting, and they had not caught the tide at the exact time. Claudea did not know the meaning of fear, but she was sorry for the tossing which one at least of the ladies had not enjoyed.

“My aunt will soon be better,” said Gina, holding a glass of water to Miss Medlicott's lips ; “but it was beautiful! I could not keep my eyes off that lovely lightning in the distance, and you looked like some mythological maiden rowing us to the gloomy shore of Hades.”

“You can go by yourself another time,” said her aunt, opening her eyes. “I've had enough of your

islands. Who could expect to be so tossed about in such a short crossing? I feel better now. I think I can walk back to the mill."

"Dumb Davy shall carry your shawls, and if you will take my arm I think you would prefer walking," said Claudea, in the gentle protecting manner that at once drew hearts to her. There were occasional rumbles heard of distant thunder, and on the low horizon broad flashes of sheet lightning could be seen, but as yet there was no rain.

"The storm is still far off," said Claudea on their way home. "I am glad we did not delay longer, but you must not think badly of the island in consequence. If you could see a storm from there you would forgive the bad passage across. The sea seems to raise itself up in great angry waves, as if anxious to sweep away all the rocks and islands in its path. But they are so calm and quiet, and bear patiently the sea's anger, till once more all is quiet and peaceful around them."

"That is a beautiful picture," said Gina, lifting her blue eyes to Claudea, and thinking she had never seen anyone so wonderful before. Never again would she talk of common people or the vulgarity of the middle class if it could produce a Claudea, forgetting that perhaps exceptions prove the truth of rules.

The windmill stood out in dazzling whiteness against a background of angry indigo sky. The sails were not going, but the wind whistled through the skeleton arms as if longing to send them whirling

into space. Mrs. Price and Sezerina both ran out to welcome back their visitors, but Claudea noticed that Sezerina's eyes were red as if she had been crying, and that she did not look at all happy.

"Poor Rina," she thought, "if only she could get over this folly. If I had the courage I would speak to Morgan myself, but it is not always safe to speak to him. He will sometimes do something worse to spite one."

Miss Medlicott went to lie down, but Gina insisted on bringing Claudea upstairs to see her sketches.

Sezerina disappeared into her own parlour, having no liking for the pretty lady who had taken such a fancy to Claudea. China and hardware do not look well on the same shelf. Gina in the meanwhile seated herself near to Claudea, and turned over her sketches and her treasures. She made up her mind that Claudea must henceforth be her friend, and that she must learn from her how to manage a boat, and live the same free happy life as did this beautiful child of nature.

"My aunt says that I shall never know my own mind, but she is wrong. I am sure I should be happy to live here always, and to learn all you know about nature."

"Oh, it isn't learning, it's loving everything, and loving seems often to mean pain. When Blackstar died, something went out of my life, but to you she would only have been an ordinary cow. How can one teach people that? Besides, you are a grand

lady. St. Castell or the island would seem small to you, whilst to me it is immense ; it is my world."

" But when you marry, your husband must think as you do ? "

" Yes, he will. A man is different. He lives either in doing or in thinking, and you see one could think as much as one liked on my island. I have often stayed close to Thordis all through a long summer afternoon thinking and thinking, and I did not want parties and amusement as you would want them."

" I don't care about parties either. I want something to fill my imagination. Do you know, Miss Claudea, you have been able to feed your own imagination, and I wanted someone to provide mine. I must tell you my faults—for I think you are good and beautiful, and you would not misunderstand me. I was engaged to a very nice good man. He was clever, and yet after a time he did not seem to be able to fill my heart and imagination enough. So I broke off our engagement because I was really in love, or thought I was, with another man, but that has all come to nothing ; and sometimes I feel that I was wrong, and that truth is better than imagination, and if I had been true to—to my lover, I should have learnt to be better and more satisfied with myself."

" We must love others for themselves, not for what they give us," said Claudea, folding her hands, and looking far out upon the stormy sea. " If you had been true to your lover, your life would have been

truly filled. But I ought not to be saying this to you."

"You don't know how much I like to hear you talk. Indeed, I see now I was wrong, and I believe I do love him still ; indeed, I know I do. If he were by my side now, I should tell him I was sorry. I wonder if he would forgive me."

"If he loved you really, I am sure he would."

"Yes, if—but I believe my punishment will be to care about him when he no longer cares for me." Gina stood up, and she too looked out upon the stormy distance. "I want my life filled, and now at times it seems so empty, so empty. You have no such feelings have you ?"

"No. God's dear sea and land and all his creatures fill it. Besides," added Claudea simply, "I have a lover too, and I have not cast him off as you have done. He will come back here some day, and we shall be as happy as the day is long. He looks upon God's world with true eyes, and all his thoughts are great and beautiful."

"Then he must be a very uncommon man. Do tell me more about him."

Claudea shook her head.

"I must not say any more about him now ; but you are very kind, and some day I will come and tell you all the story, and ask for your sympathy."

"Indeed, you shall have it. And in return, if ever I find the man I wronged, and if ever the past is forgiven and forgotten, I will come and tell you,

Claudea—I may call you Claudea, may I?—and you will wish me joy because it was your face that first made me dream of repentance."

"Oh, no, not mine, not mine; but perhaps the face of our dear rocks and hills, and all the works of God in this beautiful place. You cared about them a little, and they have told you their secret. When I am in trouble they comfort me, for you know Nature only talks to those who understand her."

"Will my life be ever filled again?" said Gina, resting her curly head against the back of the big armchair. "Sometimes I think not, and that my fate will be that I shall always go on wishing for the moon. If I could see the man who loved me truly, and if I could explain all the mistake, perhaps he would not understand me as you do."

"If he is good and great as you say he is, then he would understand."

When the two parted they seemed to understand each other as if they were old friends. Gina had found a woman who, with equal powers of imagination, had yet a much higher moral standpoint than her own—the pure faith of a little child and the higher ideal of the Christian woman.

As Claudea stepped out into the lane, she looked about for Sezerina, but she heard and saw nothing of her. Large drops were falling, and the darkness was strange and weird.

"Sezerina! Sezerina!" she called again; but there was no answer. "I wish she would confide in me as

she always did in old times," thought Claudea. "What has come to her, I wonder? She is very unhappy, I am sure. What can I do to help her?"

But Claudea had now to hasten indoors, for soon the raindrops multiplied, and fell like pellets of lead, as if angry at having reached the earth. She was quite wet before the friendly porch of the "Mermaid" was reached, and Mrs. Dewis came running out, glad to see her child safely at home.

"Indeed, Claudea, you must change your petticoat; it is wet. Hark at the thunder! My mind has been very uneasy all the afternoon, knowing you were out yonder with the ladies; but Dumb Davy came and told me you had all landed. Father always declares that you and Davy are safe enough, but I never can feel quite happy. It's a nasty bit of sea, and if there should be a hurricane——"

"Then no one would start in a storm, you know, mother dear. Still, I'll own I was glad to see the ladies safe on land. There was no danger for us; but sometimes visitors are frightened, and don't keep still."

"By the way, Claudea, here's a letter for you. It's from London. See if it's a visitor."

Claudea opened the letter slowly. A bright flush spread over her face, and she turned away. She knew the writing, but she looked at the signature to make sure. Then she said calmly:

"No, mother, it's not from a visitor; it's from

Mr. Ravenscroft. I'll tell you more presently." Then she put the letter in the bosom of her dress, and went about her business, hardly hearing the thunder, or noticing the great streaks of lightning which zigzagged across the heavy clouds of blue blackness.

Herbert Ravenscroft had written to her! It was Claudea's first love-letter, as wonderful and precious to her as a first love-letter must be to every true-hearted woman. She would not read it till she was alone, and it was not easy to be alone at the "Mermaid" till she went up to bed; so she kept the precious paper close to her heart, and smiled at her own happiness, hardly hearing the talk at supper.

"Come, Claudea, let's draw the curtain, girl, and shut out this storm," said Martin Dewis. "Where's Morgan? He's getting that unsociable, it's not often he joins us at the right time."

"Morgan won't look at his blessings with both eyes," answered Mrs. Dewis, trying to take her son's part. "In time, Martin, he'll come round. You must be patient with him, my man."

"I prefer seeing blue sky about me," said Martin, sitting down with a beaming face, for his good nature seldom failed. "It's the Methodies that love stormy weather, and prefer dulness. We church-folk have never been like that, thank God!"

"We have all our good points," answered his wife; "but pride hasn't such a good fit on the figure as humility, Martin. Good Lord, what a clap of thunder!"

Claudea, dear, go to the front, and see if the yard-gate is shut."

Claudea rose hastily, and opened the porch door. The heat was still oppressive, in spite of the rain. Not heeding the downpour, she stepped out a moment to do her mother's bidding. As she stood there, sheltering herself under a great thorn-bush, a figure passed her quickly, on the other side of the gate, which bordered the high road. The instant, however, was enough for her to recognize Sezerina's figure wrapped up in an old homespun cloak. Regardless of the storm, Claudea opened the gate and hastened after her friend, calling her by name:

"Rina, Rina, where are you going? Come back!"

But there was no answer. A sudden flash of lightning all at once seemed to envelop Sezerina, and to show every fold of her great cloak; then darkness succeeded, and when Claudea tried to peer into it all was blotted out of sight. She knew that it was no good going further, for Sezerina did not mean to be overtaken, but what could be her motive?

"Why, child, whatever did you mean by staying so long?" exclaimed her mother; "you are wet to the skin. You had only just to look out."

"I thought I saw someone going by who wanted shelter, but they disappeared."

"A fool who is walking about at this moment must stand sorely in need of cooling his brains," said Martin, laughing. "Now, mother, cut the ham and let's begin supper."

As the thunder rolled overhead, and the forked lightning appeared to hiss in blue jagged lines across the clouds, Claudea repeated to herself, "Where can Sezerina be going? My poor Rina!"

Morgan was out too. Were they still meeting in secret? Did her brother really care about Rina, and yet if he did would Mr. Price ever allow his daughter to marry a man of whom public gossip said nothing that was good? Martin Dewis and his wife were the only persons who did not hear the local discussions concerning Morgan's ill fame. No one dared to come to honest upright Dewis and tell him the truth.

At last the time came when Claudea could be alone, free to read her first love-letter! She closed her door, and drawing back her curtain, looked into the black darkness. The thunder had ceased, except that low rumbling sounds could be heard far out to sea, preceded by pale blue flashes along the distant sea horizon. As she gazed towards the sky, the clouds parted, and one star shone forth. Then Claudea knelt down, and clasping her letter, she prayed that she might be worthy of this great gift that had come to her. Suddenly she remembered Teilo, and rose quickly with a sigh.

"Poor Teilo! but I cannot give him what I have not got to give. Some day he will be glad, and he will become a true preacher, with no wife to hinder him or to spoil his work."

Then she unfolded her letter and read Herbert's loving words:

“MY DEAREST CLAUDIA,

“You told me not to write to you, but though I have plunged into town life again my heart flies back to St. Castell and to you. I find myself holding your hand and walking on your island. I see all the beautiful sights in my mental vision, and the birds bring me messages from you. It seems very long till Christmas, but I must obey you, unless you call me back. Some day, darling, I shall have your picture painted just as I saw you by Thordis, and all the beauty of the place will pass into your still more beautiful face, and I shall be at your feet, dear, waiting to hear you say ‘yes.’”

Then Herbert went on to tell her about his life and his friends, and he ended with these words :

“The summer is going, my love, but let it go. I do not love it, as it keeps you from me. Let it fly away, and let the winter come and bring me to you. Good-bye, noblest and sweetest Claudia,

“Your devoted lover,

“HERBERT.”

Claudea read and re-read this letter many times, read it indeed till she knew each shape of each letter, and till she had every word by heart. The summer was flying, and the winter would bring Herbert back, and life would be all happiness.

When she laid her head on the pillow she felt too happy for words; only it seemed that God was cradling her in His everlasting arms, and that He bade her

be of good cheer. "God is good," she murmured, "God is good. He cares about each of our eligugs and about me—about me—and yet I cannot fly heavenwards as they do."

Then rocked by happiness Claudea fell asleep, and in her dreams there mingled the sights and the sounds of the island, which was all bathed in sunshine and glowing in the evening gold. But gradually the vision of gold faded, the wind rose and whistled through the rafters of the island farm. Then the sound changed into Blackstar's dying moans, and Claudea's soul grew sad, and still more sad, till she started up to hear a shower of pebbles against her window. She jumped out of bed even before she realized what she was doing, and wrapping a big shawl round her, she ran to the casement. The moon was rising, a pale sickly moon, shedding only a faint glow on the surrounding objects. It was still warm, and every now and then a gust of wind swept by as if it were a belated straggler from the storm, bemoaning its loneliness.

"Who is it? What do you want?" asked Claudea, trying to distinguish the person who had disturbed her. Then she saw two long lean arms thrown up in silence.

It was Dumb Davy, and his gesture said, "Come at once, come at once!"





CHAPTER XV.

ON THE SHORE.

“The whole world’s life is a chant to the sea-tide’s chorus ;
Are we not as waves of the water, as notes of the song ?”

DUMB DAVY stood there outside under Claudea’s window shivering from cold, and occasionally uttering a low unearthly sound, which in times of great excitement he seemed able to produce. His head shook, and his teeth chattered, as he gazed earnestly up at the casement above him. Then he saw the light disappear, but he could not hear the sound of unfastening bolts. At last his mistress, Claudea, stood before him. She seized his shoulder, not roughly, but as if anxious to make him understand her signs.

“David, what do you mean by coming here to me now ? Look, it is not three o’clock yet ; not a soul is awake. Tell me what is the matter ? How did you come here ?”

“Come with me quickly,” said Davy. “There is someone who wants help. You will know what to do. Come down at the Porth.”

"Davy! all that way? Who wants me? How can I go if you don't say more?"

Davy shivered again and turned his head away. He seemed too much mentally disturbed to be able to answer, and Claudea did not hesitate any longer. It was so strange for Davy to come and call her up like this in the dead of night, that he evidently thought she was much wanted, and she could not disappoint the poor boy.

"I am coming, Davy. Try and collect your wits, and tell me as we walk along what made you come for me." She led the way, and stepping out of the garden gate, closed it softly behind Davy. The earth was overmantled with a misty cloud that spread to some depth over the lower level of the country. It covered the base of the old village cross, and hung thickly over the churchyard and over the river-bed, but above it all the silvery light tried to pierce the soft opaque cloud, at times seeming in this effort to tear it apart, and to disperse the wool-like fragments over uneven places.

For some time the two walked quickly on in silence. After the churchyard was passed Dumb Davy appeared to lose some of his fears, and running on a few steps led the way, every few minutes turning back to see if Claudea were close beside him. As for her, she did not pause in her walk; she hardly dared to think what had happened, only she knew it was something dreadful to have made Davy come for her. The great silence of nature made her realize the lone-

liness of the spot, almost frightening the girl who had so little natural fear. She would have blessed a bird who had chirped her one greeting, but all was silent except for that occasional moan of the wind. When they had walked about a mile, she caught up Davy, and again laid her hand upon his shoulder. They were reaching the rising ground that led to the Porth, and in the mysterious beyond was the great expanse of grey sea. The waves, just visible in the dimness, looked still angry and sullen after the storm, and there was a long calling sound of the underground swell, and the ceaseless beating of waves upon the rocky shore was now audible.

"Is the tide rising, Davy? Has the turn come?" she asked, knowing Dumb Davy was as good as a table of tides.

"Yes," signed Davy, "the tide has turned some while back, but we shall be in time."

"In time for what? Can't you explain?"

"The body—his body is below."

Claudea was silent in her turn now. She shuddered a little, and she would not ask whose body it was; but she began wondering where she could procure help at such a time of night. Davy's mother was a poor, feeble widow, and there was not another cottage anywhere close to that spot. The nearer they approached the Porth the quicker Dumb Davy walked, swaying his arms backward and forward as if to propel his body still faster. Claudea was fleet of foot, or else she could not have kept pace with him.

Now the Porth was in sight ; they passed the gate through the field, the only entrance to this bay ; then very soon they reached the head of the steep path down to the shore. Davy paused and appeared to listen, but to Claudea there came no audible sound save the sound of the eternal sea.

"Where is he, Davy ?" she asked, shuddering a little, for the great grey silence frightened her. Davy, walking on, pointed below, and Claudea followed the lad, who now seemed to proceed with evident unwillingness, every few minutes pausing to peer down among the rocky edge that fringed the western side of the bay. She followed him anxiously as he stepped down upon the sand ; then, walking through the shingles, he crept close to the foot of the rocks, and peered in and out amongst their black masses.

All at once he uttered his weird cry, quite unlike any sound made by the ordinary voice of a human being, and quickly drew back.

"There he is," he signed to Claudea. "He fell from above. I saw him fall."

Claudea shivered too ; she knew not why, for the poor motionless form she saw the next instant was not one to cause fear. It lay there so still, so very still ; only the wind lifted a little bit of his coat and flapped it, and blew away his hair from the forehead. Claudea stepped boldly forward now, for there was something for her strong woman's hand to do. She stooped down and looked closely at the form. It was Teilo. His eyes were closed, and blood was matted

on some portion of his thick hair. One leg seemed bent under him, and Claudea fancied it must be broken ; or worse—for stooping lower she fancied she heard no breath and that he was dead. A cold shiver ran through her. How came it that Teilo was here ? Teilo, who knew every step of the country better than she did herself. How had he come here ? Was it an oversight in the dark night, or was it——? Anyhow, something must be done. She raised his head a little, and bade Davy try to liberate the leg. Then she dipped her hand-kerchief in a pool, and bathed the hair and forehead. She tried to feel his pulse, but her own pulses appeared alone to answer her question—“ Is he still alive ? ”

“ Davy, we cannot carry him up the path, you and I. It is impossible. You must go for more help. Why didn’t you explain more ? You must make haste, too ; the bay does not take long to fill. I will stay here. Go to the Norris’ cottage ; there are three men there. They must come at once.”

Dumb Davy seemed now to regain his calmness, and ran off to do as he was bid, whilst Claudea remained alone in the pale light, listening to the roar of the surf against the fringe of rocks that ran out for some way into the sea.

His face she thought looked very stern and noble ; the deep-set eyes, now closed, were only defined by deep shadow ; the firm mouth and compressed lips spoke of great strength of character, and the fierce inward struggle this must always entail.

“ Poor Teilo ! ” thought Claudea, “ he has not had

much joy in his life ; even his religion was sad. That was because he could not believe that God is Love, and that God is good and does all things well. How could this accident have happened ?" As she sat on a rock with Teilo's head on her knees, she meditated deeply on this mystery ? She looked up above her to see what signs of the fall there were, but the grey-ness prevented her seeing clearly. She noticed that there were some clods of earth and grass close by ; they had, of course, fallen with Teilo, but it was all very strange. Next she began rubbing his hands, and trying to restore some circulation. She stooped her head low, listening for some faint sound of pulsation. She thought he still breathed, and smiled as she continued patiently rubbing his hands. Time passed, but time now seemed like eternity, for before her was the in-coming tide, bounding up against the rocks, and slowly covering those which stood as sentinels to the rest. The light was gradually increasing, but what could Davy be doing that he was so long ? If the tide came up to them, alone she could not drag Teilo out of the way, for he was a big, strong man, and too heavy for her to lift. Would Davy make the men understand ? She had forgotten that everyone did not make or comprehend his signs as she did. But what else could she have done ? Never had Claudea felt so helpless and so puzzled, for the waves had now come within a few feet of Teilo, and the cold salt spray at times flung a whole shower over them both. She must do something. Very gently she lifted

Teilo's head, and placed it flat on the sand ; then getting up from her cramped position she stooped down, and putting her hands under his arms, she dragged him forward a few inches. She heard a very slight groan of pain, which comforted her ; but then she saw to her dismay how little she had been able to move the wounded man. That little, however, revealed something which made her feel cold as a stone as she stooped down to pick it up. It was a cap, and a cap of such peculiar make and colour that she could not mistake it. She had often laughed about it, and teased Morgan about it. It was his cap. She could have sworn to it in any court of justice, and so could half the village of St. Castell. Morgan's cap ! Her brother had then been concerned in this ; she felt that this was true. She had dimly guessed it before ; only nothing would have made her formulate her idea in words. She had always dreaded that something dreadful would happen, and now here was proof. No, there must be no proof. She could not guess or say what had taken place. It might have been that Teilo was in the wrong, and when he was able to defend himself he should speak or no, as he thought best. It took her but a moment to make up her mind ; then she seized the cap, which had blood on it, and leaving Teilo, she went down to the water's edge, and eagerly looked about for some hiding-place. The sea was bad at keeping secrets. Without reason the waves sometimes floated in to shore strange bottles, or bits of wrecks, or other relics. It might

refuse to keep this secret; but somehow it must be kept. She climbed on to the rocks as far as the water would let her, and looking about for a deep fissure, she dropped the tell-tale cap into it, forcing it down with a sharp stone and then filling up the hole.

She had barely succeeded in doing this when she heard voices, followed by a shout, so she rose hastily and made the best of her way back, though not without some difficulty, for the rocks were slippery with salt water. Then she saw that a great foam-crested wave dashed itself on the shingles at Teilo's feet, and covered him with white scum and fragments of seaweed. At the same moment two strong men lifted him bodily away out of this second danger of death.

"Why didn't you come sooner?" said Claudea, still feeling guilty. "I did not know what to do. I could only drag him up a few inches."

Christian and John Norris were two young fishermen, not famed for sobriety, but not bad-hearted fellows either.

"We couldn't wake easily, Miss Claudea; and then for the life of us we couldn't understand Dumb Davy. Indeed, father refused to come, though I declared he wanted us all. It's a bad job, this is. He" (pointing to the unconscious form) "must have been coming home from one of the villages, but why he should fall over beats us. However, I think John and I can carry him up again. If we had a stretcher now, it would be easy; but there's no time to fetch one."

"Davy can fetch a blanket," said Claudea. "That

will be better than carrying him. He groaned when I touched him.. You see it was very dark before the moon rose, and I dare say he missed his way."

"If it 'a been Christian now," said John, chuckling, "there would 'a been no difficulty in guessing the reason, but Teilo Price is a teetotaler. Good Lord ! how Dumb Davy gives me the creeps, with his legs and arms like windmill sails, and his head shaking fit to fall off ; still he can run ! Whatever did he fetch you for, Miss Claudea ; it was very brave of you to come alone with that lad so full of his antics. There ain't another in St. Castell as would do it."

Claudea smiled.

"I'm not afraid of the dark, and Dumb Davy's as gentle as a child, and very quick of thought, too. He's more brains than you others know of."

"Were you looking for a boat, Miss Claudea, when we came down ? Davy was quite frightened the first minute at not seeing you by the body."

"Oh, no ! I—I was tired of sitting still, and I was cold, too. Here is Davy and the blanket. Now lift him up gently."

Claudea proved of great help now in giving directions for the wounded man's comfort. It was settled he should be taken to the widow's cottage, and that Christian should run for the St. Castell doctor, and John was to take a short cut to the mill to warn the Prices of the accident.

"Are you going to walk home, Miss Claudea ?" he asked.

"I'll wait at the cottage a bit till the doctor comes. I can't leave till I know," she answered.

In a few minutes the procession of men had gone up the path, and Claudea was left alone with Dumb Davy. She stooped down and examined the place where Teilo had fallen. The sea was washing half over it now, and very soon all signs of the marks would be effaced. She heaved a sigh of relief. She did not notice Davy till she felt him pulling at her skirt ; then rising she followed him up the path. When they had reached the summit, instead of walking across the field to his cottage Davy turned sharp round and followed the edge of the cliff. The light was becoming stronger now ; the dawn was breaking, and the half light added to the unreality of the scene. Mechanically she followed the boy till he stopped short, and pulling her sleeve made her pay attention to him, as with his brown bony fingers he traced out two footmarks. One was long and thin ; the other as long, but broader and deeply studded with nails. Claudea knew now what Davy meant, for he then started up, and turning round he pointed to his tiny window in the roof of the cottage. The lad had seen something from that same watch-tower ; he had seen, and he knew.

Claudea put her hand on his shoulder. Her face was deadly pale.

"Davy," she said in her sign-language, "Davy, you know how it happened ? You saw who was here besides Teilo Price ?" The boy nodded. "Davy,

because you love me—because I have done something for you—remember, never tell anyone.” She put her finger on her lips, and Davy did the same. There was a pause. Claudea understood, and was certain that wild horses could not draw the secret from Davy; she understood also why he had come to fetch her, alone, and in that strange manner; she understood everything, or thought she did so, and her heart was cold and sad.

“Davy, you are a good lad, and very, very faithful. I shall not forget it, Davy; you may be sure of that.”

Davy’s face beamed with delight. All the anxiety and the frightened look disappeared from his thin face and his large startled eyes. *She* knew it, and *she* said he had done right. He was to be silent and to forget. Where was the living creature who would make him disobey her, his mistress, his Miss Claudea? Where indeed?

Claudea stooped down again, first looking round to see no one was watching her; then she began as far as possible to efface the feet marks, Davy helping her. This done, she hastened back the way she had come, and walked across to the cottage.

Davy’s mother was busy doing all she could for Teilo, who had not yet opened his eyes, but now groaned at intervals.

“It’s a sad business, Miss Claudea, a sad business, and you’re an angel to take all this trouble. So it was my Davy who ran to fetch you. Bless the lad! I never heard him go out; I’m a very heavy sleeper. But there! he shouldn’t have gone to you, but he

thinks you know everything, and can do everything. He's such faith in you, has my Davy."

"He was quite right. You see I can understand him better than anyone else does, and he knew I shouldn't refuse to follow him. Oh yes, Davy was quite right. You must do all you can for Mr. Teilo. His poor father and mother will be sorely grieved at the accident, but you won't be the loser for your trouble, though I'm sure you wouldn't think of that if it was to help anyone, Mrs. Neeld."

"There's no difficulty in knowing what to do, Miss Claudea. As for Davy, he'll give his last crust away to a beggar or to a dumb creature. It's my belief he understands what they say. Mercy on me, Miss Claudea! I'm sure Mr. Teilo's got a leg broke! See—but I durst not touch it."

At last the doctor made his appearance, and the new day having finally opened its eyes upon St. Castell and upon the islands of the sea, also looked down upon the white stricken face of Teilo Price. The news soon became general, and the neighbourhood of the lonely cottage was the scene of much talk and discussion. Mrs. Price had hastened to her son, and she and the doctor were with him. All useless outsiders were turned out, and betook themselves to the cliff, to discuss the accident above the spot where Teilo had fallen. That was all they knew, and very soon the whole place was so trampled on that any of the original footsteps Claudea had seen and had partly effaced became quite obliterated.

Claudea walked home alone in the early morning. Her face had new lines of care and thought upon it, and her step had lost some of its elasticity. After she had descended the hill, she entered the old church and knelt down to pray in the beautiful grey building, round which the starlings were already bestirring themselves, and preparing for their daily toil. Claudea prayed for those who had erred and strayed from God's ways ; she did not mention any name, even to herself, only with her child-like faith she added, "O God, Thou knowest ; O God, have mercy!"

As she rose she pressed her hand against her bosom—against something that crackled, and then, suddenly remembering what it was, she smiled happily. Unconsciously she had placed Herbert's letter in her jersey, and it had been close to her all through this dreadful time.

"That was why I was so calm and so able to do the right thing. Yes—I did the right thing, I am sure I did. When Teilo is well again he will tell me the why and the wherefore, and he will thank me for hiding that cap."

"There you are, my dear!" exclaimed her mother, when Claudea entered. "Well, well ; this is a sad accident, and I'm glad you were of use. It's Dumb Davy who showed sense by coming to find you, that he did. You understand him better than anyone else."

At this moment Martin Dewis entered with a troubled face.

"Misfortunes never come alone. Look at this note, mother, which I've just had. Tom Wolf brought it back from the station." He handed a sheet of paper to his wife, and on it was written :

"DEAR FATHER,

"You have made me for years a mere tool for your own plans and your own money-getting. I'm off to America ; don't expect to see me again. Tell mother I'm sorry not to say good-bye to her. She is the only one I regret.

"MORGAN."

Mrs. Dewis burst into tears, and Claudea was silent from surprise and dismay. Then kneeling down by her mother, she whispered :

"Mother, don't cry. It is better so—better so. Our misfortunes are often our blessings—only we don't know it. I'm sure of it, quite sure."

"Ay ; but he was my son, child ; and let Morgan be what he may, I am his mother."





CHAPTER XVI.

SET FREE.

“If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty.”

THERE was one person who almost enjoyed Teilo's illness, and that was the Hon. Georgina Ashton; for every day Claudea came up to find out how he was getting on, and to give a helping hand to Sezerina. Then Gina usually managed to lure Claudea upstairs into her sitting-room so as to have a talk with her. Very often their conversation turned on Gina's forsaken lover; for now she knew that Claudea took his side, she liked to hear his defence from her lips. Also, Gina soon found out Claudea's appreciation of poetry. She had a deep love for it herself, and a natural talent for reading it aloud; so that even Miss Medlicott, who never was quite sure if this strange friendship was *comme il faut*, was won over when she saw that Gina really interested herself about reading books with this new friend. Of course Claudea was, she remarked, a very wonderful exception. With all her simplicity, she had superior

abilities, and she evidently thought deeply about all she read; but then it was to be remembered that Claudea's friends were by no means so extraordinarily superior. Good sort of people, of course, but—but—Then she added :

“ I do hope, Gina, you don't mean to ask Claudea Dewis up to London when we go back there this autumn. People would be sure to ask where Miss Dewis came from. That is a polite way of inquiring if she is of good family. It really would not do to say she was an innkeeper's daughter. I don't say anything against her; she is a very superior person, and very interesting, but——”

“ As if I cared, Aunt May, whose daughter she is. Everybody must be somebody's child. I can't help being father's child any more than Claudea can help her parentage. It is really quite ludicrous.”

“ Still, my dear, there is a fitness in things. You are a great Radical, and of course it's the fashion, but if Claudea were not what she is, why——”

“ Of course I shouldn't like her and admire her so immensely. Honestly, Aunt May, the days have certainly come when we must take people as we find them. Herbert used to say so.”

“ I wonder you like to mention that poor fellow's name. You treated him very badly, and he really was in love with you.”

“ I have confessed to Claudea, and she says he will forgive me. Of course I mentioned no names. There is one thing that troubles me, however, about dear

Claudea. I am so afraid she has a liking for poor Teilo Price. He is a very worthy man, but he is a Dissenting preacher, and not fit to tie her shoe-strings. She and Sezerina are quite, quite different. I do hope she will never marry this Teilo."

"The best thing she could do, I should say. He is a superior, handsome young man, only so sanctimonious-looking. A village wonder never succeeds in the *beau monde*. Do you remember Admiral Snelling? He married a village-girl. He said he had educated her, but the education was invisible, and she really *was* a trial."

"It's no use your speaking against Claudea to me, Aunt May. I have told her she shall be my friend," and the pretty blue-eyed little lady firmly pressed her lips together, as if she was prepared to go to the stake for her new friendship.

"So she has not yet seen the invalid preacher?"

"No; he will see no one except his mother and the doctor—not even his sister. It is hard on her, poor girl; but evidently he has received a great shock from falling over the cliff, and the doctor says quiet is very necessary for his recovery. His leg will never be straight again, they say—the bone was so badly broken. There is Claudea coming! Look, Aunt May; isn't she beautiful as she walks along? and so unconscious of her beauty."

Gina waved her small white hand as a sign she wished Claudea to come upstairs, and soon this latter made her appearance.

"When are you going to take us to the island again? Now it is September, and if you do not take me soon I shall go over with someone else," said Gina.

"Indeed, I have had no time except to go over in a great hurry. It is six weeks since Teilo Price's accident, and I am so glad to be able to help my friends a little. This morning Sezerina sent me word her brother wanted to see me. He feels stronger, and there is some idea of his being moved to our farm on the island. He would get well quickly there, I am sure."

"Are you very fond of Mr. Teilo?" said Gina, laughing.

"We—were playfellows. Yes, I am very fond of him. Now Morgan has gone to America I shall want another brother." Claudea spoke thoughtfully, and Gina felt sorry she had questioned her. Very often it seemed as if her own shallowness were being rebuked by Claudea's straightforward simplicity.

"As a brother I give you leave to like him, but your absent lover must not be jealous."

Claudea's face was suddenly illuminated as if by beautiful sunshine.

"If you knew what it was to love someone who is above you in all that is good and noble and—No, I shall love him always; no one can take his place. I am happy even when I think about him, but lately I have had no time to think. Now I must go to

Teilo. His sister said he would soon be ready to see me. He will have much to say to me, poor fellow. This sad accident has put an end to many of his most loved plans. My heart is very, very sad for him."

"Your sympathy would heal most wounds, dear Claudea," said Gina. "Well, then, remember very soon we must go over. But choose a calm, fine day, for my aunt's sake."

Claudea went into the passage and softly called Sezerina, who came slowly upstairs.

"Is he ready, Rina? Are you sure he will be strong enough to see me? You look quite worn out, dear. I wish I could help you more."

Sezerina shook her head sadly, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Everything is changed; Teilo is changed most of all. He will have nothing to say to me." Then with an effort she altered her tone. "I think if he could stay on the island a little while he would be better, but, oh! Claudea, mother says he's terribly altered. Come upstairs. He likes best to lie in the little room at the top of the mill; he can see all the islands up there, and the sunshine comes in upon him."

Claudea mounted right up to the top of the mill and knocked at Teilo's door. Her heart beat fast. What would he look like? what would he say to her about that night? She lifted up her heart in simple prayer, for ever since that time she had been bearing

a burden about with her—a secret that oppressed her when she thought about it. Mrs. Price came out of the door to meet her.

"Come in, my dear. He's been expecting you; he's been wanting to see you all day. It's the first day he's been equal to it, but the doctor says he'll pull through now; but, oh! he won't be the Teilo he was before. Anyhow, the sight of you will do him good. You'll be able to get more out of him than I can. Teilo never was one to speak of what was nearest his heart. Go in, Claudea, and I'll come up presently."

And Claudea went in.

Teilo was lying on a large sofa drawn near the small window. His face was thinner and more gaunt than Claudea had imagined possible. His eyes looked like eyes that have seen strange sights—sights that have been burnt into their mental vision till the mind is filled with them and can see nothing else. For a moment Claudea stood in the doorway, and the September sunlight enveloped her and bathed her beauty in new glory and lovingly touched her shining hair. Teilo gazed at her, not as if he saw her, but as if he saw that other vision—a vision not of life, but of death; and when that inward vision faded, Claudea's face seemed only to give him pain.

"Oh! Teilo," she said, coming near to the couch and sitting down on a chair; "I'm glad to see you—glad you sent for me at last; but I've heard news of you every day. Now you must do everything to get well."

"Thank you. I'm getting on ; they say I shall be able to walk soon on crutches, and after that—but I shall never be what I was, Claudea. I shall always be lame, and most likely I shall never be a strong man again. God has taken away the glory of my strength and of my manhood. He did not want it, He thought——"

"Don't say that," said Claudea almost under her breath. "God is good. Who knows if He may not give you more spiritual power instead of strength."

There was a pause, and Teilo looked away—far away to the sea.

"I wanted to see you because you did a great deal for me on the night—of my accident. I wanted to thank you. You did it for the best, and yet sometimes I wish neither you nor Davy had helped me back to life. The sea would have ended all pain."

"That is poor thanks to God who gave you back your life, Teilo. Besides, you have so many friends waiting for you and longing for you."

Again there was a pause. The sick man was evidently longing to say something, and yet he was putting off the moment of saying it. At last, leaning on his elbow, he turned towards Claudea and looked at her earnestly.

"I want to say something ; I have said it many times to myself as I waited here for strength which will never come back again. I want to tell you, Claudea, that I look at everything with different eyes now. God knows, the world was not over full of

sunshine before, but now it is dark—all dark. I shall never marry you or anyone, and I want to release you from your promise. Even if I were well I would never marry."

Claudea felt her heart bound with a wonderful new joy. She was free! Teilo had set her free! She had been quite certain before of her own feelings, but now she was released from this weary waiting. In the midst of her joy, however, came the throb of pain for Teilo and the weight of that secret.

"Teilo, do you mean it? You know my word is not easily broken. I should have waited till Christmas Eve, and then only should I——"

"I tell you, Claudea, if I were the old Teilo I would not now marry—you." He threw some scorn into the remark, and Claudea blushed as she rose and stood up to her full height.

"You need not speak like that, because—of what I cannot help."

Teilo's eyes glowed with a strange fire, and he turned himself again towards her, searching her face to find out, if possible, the meaning of her words.

"What do you mean? What do you know? You can't know. It was an accident."

"Morgan has gone to America. We have not heard anything from him," she said simply.

"I know—but surely no one guessed but you, Claudea. Tell me no one—guessed. That is nonsense, too. You don't know anything—you cannot—you never shall know what passed between us; but

life ended for me that night—I am beginning to doubt about forgiveness now. I—I—Don't stay any longer. I cannot bear any more."

Claudea's beautiful face was sad, and strangely troubled. She could not understand Teilo's words. He was utterly changed—about that there was no doubt. She walked slowly and silently towards the door, but Teilo called her back.

"Claudea, won't you give me your hand just once? and then forget me and all the pain associated with me. I shall never trouble you again, or weary you with my mad love."

Claudea came back, but she had been deeply grieved. She could only hold out her hand in silence. But the very touch of her warm fingers seemed too much for the sick man. He dropped her hand immediately, and motioned her away.

When she was gone, and he had heard the last faint sound of her light footsteps, he buried his face in his pillow, and, clenching his teeth and hands, he tried to fight against his great mental agony.

"I love her—I love her still. Nothing can kill that love, not even Morgan's wickedness; but, even if she would have me, even if all were well, I could never call her mine—never. As it is, she loves another. I am sure of it—sure of it. She is so simple, she believes when her heart speaks. Oh, God! why have I lived? How can I work for Thee with this great hatred in my heart, and with the heart of a murderer within me? How can I—how can I?"

The perspiration fell slowly from his brow, and the feeling of utter weakness was so strong that when Mrs. Price crept back again to her post, she found him in an almost unconscious state.

"My poor boy, my poor Teilo! you shouldn't have seen Claudea," she said to herself. "He was so fond of her; she should have married him, and then—and then——"

But Mrs. Price knew that Claudea never had loved Teilo more than as a sister; only she herself had lived in hopes that some day her son's goodness and cleverness would win this bride, and that love for her would keep him at home.

The next day Teilo was better, but very silent and gloomy. He had but one thought and one wish.

"Mother, if Sylvester Dewis will let me, I should like to go to the island. I feel I shall get better there, and I shall see no one. The sea air will do me good, and I shall be able to breathe—I can't here."

"It's airy enough, however," said his mother; "and you used to say you liked the sound of the mill-sails going round."

"When I am stronger I shall like it again, but not now. It seems as if the great arms wanted to fling me into hell."

At this Mrs. Price hastened off to Martin Dewis, and easily obtained permission to take Teilo to the island farm. She meant to go and settle him in, and then come back to the mill as soon as possible; for she could but ill be spared. Indeed, if it were not that

Sezerina was such a helpful, hardworking girl now, Mrs. Price could not have left home.

"It is ever since Teilo's illness she has turned over a new leaf," thought her mother. "She is very fond of Teilo; though, strange to say, he seems to have turned against her and against everyone else. He won't have her near him. It's my opinion that fall affected poor Teilo's brain; otherwise one couldn't make it all out."

At the "Mermaid" there was no gloom as there was at the mill-house. After Claudea's interview with Teilo she walked home sadly and thoughtfully, but before she reached her own room, joy had asserted itself and banished sorrow. It seemed to her that the September sun had never shone so brightly, the scent of flowers had never perfumed the air with such exquisite odours, the birds had never sung with such fulness of joy, and the island seen from the mainland was indeed to her the Island of the blest.

All that evening she nursed her joy, and hugged it to her heart. She sang snatches of old songs, and chatted to her mother. There was no Morgan to damp her happiness, and Silvester, who came over to supper, was as cheerful as she was herself.

Old Martin had got over his displeasure about the sudden disappearance of his son, and had supplied his place on the farm. He was quite contented if Claudea was with him, or if he could hear her sweet voice singing about the place. Of course some o. the talk turned on Teilo, and his wish to go to the island.

Martin Dewis was only too ready to help his neighbours, and in his secret heart he was a little glad to think that a poor cripple as Teilo must be in the future could never aspire to the hand of his beautiful Claudea. This being the case he would do all he could for the young man, even though he did dislike his preaching and his canting ways.

That night, when the house was still and quiet, Claudea wrote her first letter to her love. It was very short, but every word was written with a pen dipped in happiness :

“ Will you come back now? I am free, quite free to give you my love. You asked me for an answer, and I give it now. Yes, yes! come back to St. Castell and to our island home. I shall expect you every day till I see you, and then I can tell you all. The summer is not gone yet, and the birds have not returned on their way to warmer lands. Come back with them ; only do not go away any more, but stay always, always with one who loves you dearly.

“ CLAUDEA.”

When Herbert Ravenscroft received this note, he did not hesitate, even though he was very busy, and was deeply engaged in work. Before starting for St. Castell, he visited several small and pretty houses in Chelsea, and told the agent he would write shortly about taking one of them. He wanted Claudea, but certainly not Claudea's island. That really was out of the question !



CHAPTER XVII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

“But love can every fault forgive,
Or with a tender look reprove ;
And now let naught in memory live,
But that we meet, and that we love.”

IHAVE never felt happier in my life, dear Claudea. Something very nice must be going to happen,” said Georgina Ashton, sinking back into her cushions, and looking like some sweet mermaid who has taken a fancy to step into the boat owned by a human being, “but I needn’t say that, either. I am quite satisfied, oh! yes, quite. I like to watch your movements, and this nice dumb boy is so like some mysterious attendant belonging to an ancient princess. It seems almost a pity that we should ever reach land, doesn’t it? I am glad we are going to those more distant islands instead of to your island to-day. Never mind, just for once I want to see something new; I want to sail to eternity, if that were possible.”

“We are sailing there,” said Claudea, gazing eastward, where the rosy clouds melted into soft purple, “but there is so much beauty here—oh, so much!—if

one could get rid of the pain and sorrow felt by others."

"I am always wanting something I have not got, whilst you, Claudea, are so happy in the present."

"I am very, very happy. Why not, where one has so much, oh! so much given to one? and then, 'the poetry of earth is never dead,' Keats says."

"I believe you remember beautiful words quite naturally, because—Oh, look at those birds, how quickly they flew by! I wonder if they are the souls of wandering sinners seeking for the unfindable."

"God takes care of all souls, those who have sinned, and those who are striving up to Him, I think. I have often thought of that subject. I think Wordsworth understood better than any poet how everything is from God, and returns to Him—sometimes through pain and suffering, sometimes through soft lapping waves of joy carried straight to God's bosom."

There was a silence, and the "Sea-gull," after avoiding the Whelps, made for the eastern channel so as to round Claudea's island instead of landing there. As the boat lightly skimmed the waves and skirted the shore, Claudea gazed at her home with eyes full of love and longing. She seemed to forget the presence of Gina, who also sank into a day-dream where regret mingled with a certain restless longing for something she had not got.

It was a very happy day they spent, landing on the biggest of the smaller islands, and lying there on the yellow sand looking for milk-white shells, whilst

Dumb Davy boiled a kettle and made tea. Gradually the sweet September air seemed to lull both girls into that almost silent happiness which needs nothing more, and when the purpling afternoon began to give place to the crimson of evening, they re-embarked and sailed towards home, but this time steering westward, and passing close under the great frowning cliff-nursery of the sea-gulls and the hill over which Thordis presided. As they neared the farm, Claudea gazing at it saw someone sitting on a rock close to it, and her face clouded over. She knew it was Teilo ; she could even discern his outline, and she knew that he could see her as she rowed bravely westward.

“Poor Teilo !” she said aloud. “He will never be able to take his long walks again to see the fisher-folk. They will miss him sorely, I am sure. God must prepare much after-joy for souls who cannot find their happiness on this beautiful earth. ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.’ I think some eyes do see much farther than others.”

“I am glad my aunt did not come,” said Gina. ‘She would have been afraid of all these rocks, wouldn’t she? How cruel they look, but how beautiful it all is! Yes, I shall stay here always, always, and you will be my friend always, won’t you, Claudea ?”

Claudea looked at the prettily-dressed mermaid with her sky-blue dress and her sky-blue eyes, and thought she must be a true poet’s dream. Then she smiled one of her own beautiful smiles.

"I shall always be your friend, of course, if you will let me call myself so. That seems such a wonderful name. One must do much for friends."

"It seems to me," said Gina, shading her eyes, "that there is somebody in the bay sitting near the boat-house. Can it be your brother?"

Claudea turned round, and she too shaded her eyes. Her heart beat faster as she said :

"I don't think it is my brother, but we shall see when we land ;" and to herself she added, "I shall not look again, for fear I am wrong. If it were Herbert, and if she could see that I love someone who will help me with beautiful thoughts, and who——"

Gina still gazed, however, for she had her face to the shore.

"It is very strange, but I should say it is someone I know, and yet he can't be here. Dear Claudea, sing that boat song you sang some time ago. It will be so pretty to hear it floating over the water as we come near the shore—oh, so pretty! and you look so poetical."

"Over the wavelet,
Loose be the sail set,
Far from the yellow sand,
Far from the mainland ;
Over the rocky bar,
Still gleams the morning star.
Steer for the open sea,
Follow the sea-gull free,
Winds whistle cheerily,
Answer them merrily,
Far from the yellow sand,
Far from the mainland."

Claudea laughed as she ended her song. It was one that Herbert Ravenscroft had sung, and she had picked it up from him.

The words floated low over the water in the afternoon stillness, and were clearly and distinctly audible from the shore. Sitting near the boat-house, Herbert could hear them as he watched the "Sea-gull" dipping and bounding homeward. He, too, shaded his eyes in order to see Claudea the better; but who was with her in the boat? Only now and then could he discern that it was someone arrayed in blue, for Claudea's figure intervened. A visitor doubtless; perhaps one of Sezerina's visitors, and Claudea had made her an excuse to go over to her beloved island. Nearer and nearer came the boat. Dumb Davy as he stood up furling the sail soon entirely hid the patch of blue, but Claudea was distinctly visible. He could trace the beautiful outline of her perfect figure, and he mentally thought of her and himself as sitting by Thordis; then suddenly the boat turned, and after various little splashes darted into the landing-place. Dumb Davy jumped out and made the "Sea-gull" secure with the boat-hook. Herbert walked eagerly forward, when suddenly the blue figure stood up, and the two were face to face. If he had been confronted with his own ghost, Herbert could not have felt more surprised and discomfited than he did at this moment, nor more utterly speechless than when, with a little cry of surprise and pleasure, Gina seized his hand.

"I could not believe my eyes. Is it you really, Mr. Ravenscroft? You here! Claudea, let me introduce you. Here is Mr. Herbert Ravenscroft. I knew something pleasant was going to happen to-day. Oh! I must say it at once. Claudea told me that I had behaved very badly to you. I didn't tell her your name, for how could I guess you would come here? Claudea, I did say, didn't I, that I would tell him—I know you must hate me, but, oh! I was so foolish, and so easily led away. Since I have been here I have seen how wrong I was; Claudea here—she is a dear friend of mine—will tell you this is true."

During all this speech, which Gina poured out in the fervency of her repentance, Claudea and Herbert had stood silently by. If one or the other had stopped her at once by a confession of the truth, the next step would have been easier; but the whole scene had passed too quickly for thought or speech, and Gina's upturned face seemed full of new beauty, as she looked into the eyes of her wronged lover—that is, the lover that had been hers. Claudea gazing at him closely, saw more. She saw the shadow of pain pass over his features, and she saw his quick glance at her, begging for her silence. She saw it, and her woman's mind understood, even that first moment, that when a man has loved once and loved truly, the dead voice has power to make itself heard again even from the grave. There was no melodrama possible in Claudea's nature; there was only one great over-

whelming thought and pity for him, and love at once taught her what to do.

She stepped into the boat and motioned Dumb Davy to come with her.

"Mr. Ravenscroft is a visitor at the 'Mermaid,' Miss Ashton. He has been with us before ; that is why he is here now. Perhaps he will see you home ; I must go and look at our nets out yonder."

She looked at Herbert and smiled ; then with a few strokes of the oars she shot out to sea, and turned behind the near rocks out of sight.

Herbert gathered up Gina's shawl and sketching block, and walked with her towards the steep path up the cliff. He was wondering what to say, and what not to say. In any case he was bound to Claudea—true, beautiful Claudea. At this moment he did not even wish it otherwise.

"I did not know you were here, Miss Ashton, though I heard in London that you were not in town."

"You didn't hear I was at St. Castell ? You must hate my name ; but I wanted to see you and confess. Claudea—I see you know her—isn't she delightful ? Well, she told me I had wronged you, and—and—I think when *he* suddenly married someone else I saw that I had run after a shadow. I thought he cared for me, but now I have given up the world, and I mean to bury myself here in Claudea's island."

"You ! Indeed, that would be impossible."

"I shall find peace, and in time you will let me have your forgiveness. I shall be happy then."

" You have it now," said Herbert quickly ; and then silence fell on them, as they walked past the widow's cottage, and on towards the distant St. Castell.

Gina had never felt her inferiority so much as she did now, walking by this man she had wronged, and seeing him look absent and preoccupied. She fancied he had forgiven her too easily. He could not have felt her treachery very deeply, otherwise he would not be so ready to forgive. He must first have forgotten to be able to forgive. As it happened, she did not guess what was in his mind. She did not know that this mere sight of her had thrown him into a new trouble, and that he felt his late victory might soon turn into a defeat ; not one outwardly, that did not appear possible, but a defeat which he alone should know of. The blue eyes had a magnetic power of their own ; they had more of the weakness of the sex in their appealing look than Claudea's dark, poetical eyes ; and, above all, she was of his own standing and of his own education, even if she did not possess half Claudea's mental capacity.

After a long silence Herbert spoke, very quietly and very gently :

" I have forgiven you, because time comes to our help ; but the cut in the tender bark is—is never completely healed. You do not care to look at the past, perhaps ; neither do I. If I did I should see a man who bitterly reproached you, and reproached fate who had made him cross your path—a man who had loved you simply because he could not help it. He had

no other reason and no other motive. Love had been a sudden illumination to him, a knowledge of something above himself, and then it was followed by a darkness—a darkness that could be felt—and out of which he came with pain and difficulty. He came out of it at last, but he was not the same man. He was another Herbert Ravenscroft with another ideal. He found another woman, who could give him sweet sympathy, and who knew all, and to her he offered what remained of his life and of his heart. He is pledged to her now, and very soon, when he leaves this quiet spot for the last time, he will for ever blot out all the past, and ask the future to give him what it can."

Gina still walked on by his side silently. She, too, felt that all the beauty of life was now gone. She had believed in Herbert's return to her; she had fancied they should meet again, and that her confession would at once recall her lover. Herbert, the devoted slave of old days, was engaged to another woman! He had not then waited long for her. His constancy had been of no great standing, and in the bitterness of her heart she said so.

"If I was inconstant and fickle, at least *you* soon followed my example!"

"No evil comes singly. That is the saddest part of it."

"Then friendship alone remains," she said, holding out her hand to him. He took it, and for a little time they walked on together.

"Yes, friendship, that is all," and even as he said it, sternly and decidedly, the old passion for this pretty, frail, erring girl returned like the incoming tide, and surged up all the more because she was weak, as he had been, and because he had loved her so truly during that happy time when she had loved him with all her girlish enthusiasm.

Some silent tears fell slowly down her cheeks and lost themselves in the folds of her blue dress. Without looking towards her he saw them, and had he not been pledged, or had he been less high-minded than he was, he would then have stooped and kissed her tears away. As it was, he only walked on by her side silently and without a word. At last they came to the road leading to the mill, and both were glad to pause and to say good-bye.

All the way home Gina's tears came down softly, and every now and then she brushed them away, saying to herself, "I thought this was going to be such a joyous day. I thought I was so very happy, and it has ended like this. Oh, Herbert, I deserve it all, I suppose; but how could I know the other thing wasn't real too? How could I? It is hard that when I do find it out, it must end like this."

Her pride was, however, able to assert itself before she reached the mill. She determined to say nothing about Herbert to her aunt; only to suggest leaving St. Castell as soon as possible.

When Herbert parted from Gina, instead of going on into the village he took the road back again to the

Porth. Claudea must come that way, and he must meet her. Visiting the nets was not a long affair. He walked very quickly, hoping by this rapid motion to conquer thought. He had seen Gina cry, and he had said nothing. All the rest was easy, for a first obstacle overcome makes the second danger easier. He had sought out Claudea ; he had taught her to love him ; on him rested all the responsibility, and he did not for a moment shrink from it or seek to excuse himself.

As he neared the high ground he saw her lithe form drawn out against an apricot background. She was walking slower than usual, but still her tread was firm, her head erect. Every line was beautiful, but of a beauty which does not as easily appeal to an ordinary man as it does to the soul of an artist. He hastened towards her, and the two met for the first minute in silence, but in that silence the first cold shadow was felt by both.

“ Claudea, dear,” he said, taking her right hand and placing it gently on his arm, “ did you know or guess ? ”

“ No, I never guessed that—that—it was your story,” she answered simply. “ Miss Ashton has been here some time. We have become great friends. She is very pretty, and she is a very sweet woman.”

“ She was before—all that happened.”

“ Poor Herbert ! ” said Claudea, looking up at her lover. She called him by his name, and all her great shyness seemed gone, quite gone. He felt the

difference, but could not explain it, except that he supposed she looked upon him now as her property, hers—and so he was.

"I have suffered. You know I told you everything, Claudea; but now—no one can bring back the past."

"Not the same, but another life comes back. One dreams, and then there is a waking."

"There is nothing stable, nothing sure—but come, Claudea, let us talk of our future, dear. There is much to say. I meant our meeting to be so different. You are a noble woman, Claudea, far above other women."

Claudea shook her head, but also she smiled at his praise.

"Oh, Herbert! I want you to think so. I want you to know I love you. You must do as I wish. No one knows about us. Don't tell anyone yet. I would not pain Miss Ashton for the world. Wait a little; she will be leaving soon. Let us still be free till then, and if—if—listen, Herbert! suppose your old love should come back, suppose you felt it knocking at your heart, then come and tell me. There is no pledge between us. I would not have any yet, not yet. She *must* not know."

"But, Claudea, I have told her I am not free, that I am—," he paused, the very admission that he had thus spoken appeared terrible at this moment. To Claudea, too, it told the story plainly, but it also told her that Herbert was true and honest.

"You told her you were bound—and—did you say to whom?"

"No, I mentioned no names."

"I am glad, I am very glad; she must not know it; she must never know it. It would pain her, because she cares about me. She has a loving heart for everything. Let us be free, quite free."

She released her hand, and walked on by his side as she had done in the early times before love had knocked at the door of her heart.

"If you wish her not to know I must obey you, Claudea; but are you sure it is better so?"

"Yes, yes, quite sure. Let it be so. You are free, quite free. There is time for many things in the future."

"I cannot mention your name if you forbid it, Claudea; but remember I have told her. She cannot hope or expect anything. She was heartless, cruel in the past—why should *her* feelings be considered?"

"She is my friend now, as well as yours. She is sorry, very sorry, for the past."

"What can her sorrow do? No, it would be best to be quite honest at once."

"Don't, please. You came for your answer, you know; if you ask it now, it shall be 'no' rather than to give her pain."

"It must be as you like," he answered.

"Yes; now leave me here. I am going to the Carn cottage this evening. My sick child will want to see me."

"Good-bye then; and, Claudea, give me your hand, and let me say it now as I shall always say it. God bless you, dear!—you true, noble-hearted Claudea!"

They stood side by side for a few moments; then Claudea smiled and turned away. At first she walked very quickly towards the deep blue carn; then, when she was out of sight of Herbert, she stopped short and sat down on a heather bank, hiding her face among the new green shoots of tender ling. All the heather bells trembled as they bent before her. A lark flew straight up into the evening sky, higher and higher till it was out of sight—so high up, indeed, that it could not hear the sob of a human soul upon earth, a noble, true-hearted, loving soul.





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FUTURE.

“ Know this,
Thou lov’st amiss,
And to love true
Thou must begin again and love anew.”

EVERY day Teilo, with the help of his crutches, crawled to the high land behind the farm on the island, and having found a sheltered spot with a great grey rock behind him, he sat down with his back to it and remained there gazing towards the mainland. Sometimes he would sit for hours motionless, buried in his thoughts, and with his eyes fixed towards the distant port from whence St. Castell people nearly always started for the islands. This quiet retreat was doing him much bodily good ; his strength seemed to return steadily, and the great stillness was balm to his bruised spirit. Silvester was busy all day, but he was a very kind host, leaving the sick man, when Mrs. Price had gone away, to the solitude he preferred. Teilo began to imbibe something at last from this enforced stillness and this enforced communing

with nature. His proud spirit was learning to bow to a mightier than himself. At other times, however, all the old rebellion swept over him again. What had he done to be brought thus low? Why had the hand of God visited him in this fashion when he had spent his strength in working for the cause of religion? God had forsaken him, and had gone far from him. But at such times Teilo heard a still, small voice speaking as still, small voices will speak occasionally to all God's children. Had he always been true to the call? Had he not often wrestled with his Maker in spirit, and demanded the praise of men as a reward for the service of God? Had he not pretended that the call had come to him as to some prophet of the most Highest, and at the same time had he not expected the reward of love for his services? He had said, "Claudea must be my reward;" but when he reached this spot in the winding road of thought, Teilo bowed his head in utter dejection. God had visited him with the deep affliction of shame. He could no longer lift up his head, and he could no longer ask for anything as a right. Deep shame and deep penitence are not the same; there is a sorrow that worketh death, and Teilo was drinking this sorrow, and asking God to take him out of the great world where it seemed to him impossible to walk in the narrow path.

During these moods the motionless figure with bowed head was a sight that made the farm hands walk away softly. They could not understand such

dejection, and they passed by on the other side. Once or twice it happened that it was some bird or soft rabbit that intruded on his loneliness and broke the iron chain of most sorrowful thought. At such times Claudea's words would return, and her deep love for God's world and God's dumb animals made him look up and try for himself whether from these creatures he could draw any consolation. Now and then the chirp of a yellowhammer or the clear note of a robin made him smile for a moment, and a smile has far more power than a frown. One day, too, as he sat there, he saw Claudea's boat gliding past, and he watched it a long time going eastward. He could see the blue figure in the boat with Claudea, and he was with the two in mind all that day, till the afternoon came, when he followed the track of their home-going. It was not altogether a sight to add to his happiness, and yet he would not have missed it. He began to repent of the harsh words he had used to the woman he had loved so much and whom he loved still. He began to see something of his past selfishness, but this thought was very faint and not often entertained, for as yet the pain was too great.

After this several days went by in utter loneliness, for Silvester went over to the mainland to help his father, and the silent figure leaning against the rock had a still more unbroken time for meditation and dejection. The splendid autumn weather, too, began to break up. It turned stormy before its rightful time, and Teilo found he could not stay out so long.

Then the hours indoors were indeed dreary, for he could not keep his mind on printed words. The Bible would lie open before him for a long time, but he found no comfort in it, and he only lost himself in a wordless dream of despair.

One afternoon the sun burst out again from a stormy sky, and he crawled out to his accustomed seat. Over there on the mainland Claudea was living her daily life. He had released her and she was free. What was she doing with her freedom? Would she— He cast the thought away angrily, and tried to find something less sad for his broodings, when suddenly his quick ears caught the sound of footsteps. In another moment Sezerina stood by him carrying a basket on her arm. He had been indoors when the boat had rounded the Whelps, and had not seen it arriving. Sezerina stood a moment by her brother without saying a word. She was shocked to see his gaunt appearance and the lines of brooding care on his pale face. He, too, was silent; and he even looked away from her, as if the very sight of her were painful to him.

"Silvester's brought me over, Teilo," she said at last, sitting down on a rock near at hand. "Mother was so anxious I should come and bring you these things, which you'll be wanting, and there's a nice chicken for you. Are you better?"

"Why didn't you send them by Silvester without coming yourself?" muttered Teilo. "What do you want to do here?"

"I wanted to see you, Teilo."

"I told you before I didn't want to see you. I don't want ever to set eyes on you again."

Sezerina's once rosy face was pale. It was very evident she was much changed. She began crying softly, and the sound of tears only seemed still more to irritate her brother.

"What's the use of crying over spilt milk? You've got to bear your punishment, and you richly deserve it. Look at me! Why am I maimed and crippled? Don't you remember what I was, and do you see what I am now? Whose fault is it?"

Sezerina did not answer.

"There's only silence, the grave if you like, that will make up to me—and to you, too, Sezerina. Do you see how the folly of one weak girl like you can bring ruin on all around her? You were warned, too. Didn't Claudea speak to you?"

"Claudea could never be cruel to me as you are, not even if she knew, never! She's the best friend I ever had; if I had listened to her——"

"If, if, if! That's a woman's excuse. There should be no 'if' in your life. Claudea never had an 'if' in her life."

"How do you know? I'm not so sure. Of course Claudea would never do wrong; but if she'd married you right away last year all this wouldn't have happened. She was caught by a gentleman's manners that mean nothing."

"You speak about things you don't understand.

Claudea said 'no' and 'no' again before ever she was inclined to think about Mr. Ravenscroft."

"He's come back to the 'Mermaid.'" Sezerina said this quite shortly, but she watched out of the corner of her eyes what the effect would be on Teilo. She saw his poor thin face flush deeply, but he said nothing.

"Yes, he's come; but there's something strange about it all. Do you know, Teilo, Miss Ashton is a friend of his. I saw his photograph in her room, and the other morning she had been crying over it. He and Claudea haven't walked together anyhow, and she's so still and quiet. I know her well. When Claudea's still and doesn't sing, then there's something very much the matter."

Teilo had not lost a word of Sezerina's speech, although he did not look at his sister, and pretended almost not to be listening. Strange to say, however, he found no pleasure in her words; only a great rising anger against the man who might be playing fast and loose with Claudea's love. Such love—such true, pure deep love—that he had almost sold his soul to possess, and which she must have given freely to this stranger.

"You shouldn't go prying into Claudea's affairs. You have enough to think of yourself. You will have the burden of the secret to carry all your life, Sezerina, if—and you have given it to me. How have you the heart to think of anything else?"

"I have cried till I'm afraid of mother's asking too

much," said Sezerina, crossing her arms and pouting a little. "You have a hard heart, Teilo. I don't know how you think you can go and preach a message of forgiveness to the fisher-folk, when you have such black thoughts about me. He's gone now. Can't you forgive him as—as I try to do?"

"You!" answered Teilo scornfully. "The least you can do is not to mention yourself at all. Tell mother I shall come home soon, in a week perhaps. I'm better in health, and I can walk better, but there's so little flat land here. I shall get on better at home now the sea air has done what it can for me—the sea air and the quiet."

"You can't bear the sight of me," poor Sezerina continued; "you don't try to comfort me; it's only yourself you think of. I wish I might tell Claudea. I want to feel her arms round me and to hear her kind words."

"We've talked this over before, and I told you that the first time you mention it, Sezerina, that day I shall leave St. Castell. Now go—but stop. If you see Claudea, tell her I'm better. She'll be glad to hear it, I know."

The girl rose obediently. She appeared like a slave crushed by her master's will, too much crushed to rebel.

"There's a storm coming," she said, after she had stood a few minutes. "Claudea always said if Thordis had red clouds on a line with her head the storm would come in twenty-four hours."

"I don't think so. It's clearing for good. Anyhow, you had better get home early. Tell mother I don't want to see anyone, as I shall be coming back so soon. Silvester will bring me back. He is very good to me."

Sezerina said "very well," but still stood a little longer, hoping for some kind word for herself. In this, however, she was disappointed, and turning away, she walked down to the shore, and was soon lost to sight, leaving Teilo sitting where she had found him, plunged more deeply than ever in a moody trance.

It was not late when she reached home. The house door stood open, and there were the usual sounds of life about. Her mother met her in the parlour, anxious to hear about her son, and when Sezerina had given her report, Mrs. Price added :

"Our visitors are going to leave in a week, my dear. They told me so just after you left. I thought Miss Ashton would soon find our place dull. She seems quite to mope now. To-day she was complaining that Claudea had not been to see her for some days, and she said she must see her; so I said when you came home you'd tell her."

"There is Claudea coming! Mother, tell her about Teilo; he wants her to know; I must go up to my work."

Sezerina often avoided her friend now, though all the time longing to be with her; but Teilo's avenging shadow stood between them. A few minutes after

Claudea entered, and when she had heard Mrs. Price's better report of Teilo she went upstairs and knocked at Miss Ashton's door. The little blue fairy was quite sad and silent, but she brightened up as Claudea entered.

"Dear Claudea, I have been wanting you so much, but I did not like to send for you. Mrs. Price said there was an inroad of visitors, and that you were very busy. Now sit down. My aunt is packing some of her things. We are leaving in a few days, in spite of my having said I was going to spend my life here. You see life is very uncertain."

"Are you going? I am sorry. I wanted you to stay till the birds came again. You would like to see them flocking back to my dear island, just landing there, and then, after a farewell to us, flying off to other lands. It is a sight you cannot forget."

"Faithless things! Why don't they stay?"

"That is the life God has ordained for them, isn't it? 'Thy will be done.' I have said that so many times this week, and now it seems to be my own special prayer."

"Why, Claudea, that sounds sad, and I wanted you to cheer me up. Are you sad too?"

"Oh, no. See, I am smiling. I am sorry you want comforting; but I think I know why."

"Yes, you saw it all—our meeting! It is dreadful, Claudea. If he had only waited a little while longer. I am sure, yes—almost sure—he loves me still. I dare say he is engaged to a nice sensible middle-aged

woman, the pink of propriety, and he will never be happy. I really think I shouldn't mind much if I thought he would be *very* happy. I am not *sure*, but I think I shouldn't mind! I haven't dared to go out for fear of meeting him. He has not gone yet, has he?"

"No, but he talks of going."

"Now you have seen him, Claudea, you understand how I blame myself. He is so tender, so good, and he did really love me. I don't blame him much; at least, I don't think I do. He never thought I should think differently, and come back to him. He thought I was going to marry that horrid musician. The French saying is true—*On revient toujours à ses premiers amours*. Indeed, I have lived a time of martyrdom knowing him to be so near, and yet—He is too honourable to do anything wrong towards that other woman. If I knew her I would tell her all about it. I wish you could find out—"

"If I can do anything for you I will."

"I know you would, Claudea. You first pleaded for him; you made me see how beautiful faithfulness is. I shall tell him that if ever we meet again."

"Oh, you will meet, I am sure. If he loves you best, his duty will be to say so. Besides, you are of the same mind, and you will help him in his work, and love him very much, won't you? You won't forsake him again, will you?"

"There, Claudea, you are cruel! If you knew how I repent. But I shall never have the chance of show-

ing it. I must go. I wish he would go away ; then I could stay. Why doesn't he? Why is he staying? We have never met again, but sometimes—don't tell anyone—I see him wandering along that cliff path which I can see from my room. He goes up and down, up and down there, and I can watch him without being seen, but I can't bear that much longer."

Claudea smiled again. Her smile was like a gleam of sunshine coming quickly out of a grey sky over a grey sea.

"I am sure you will be happy. I can be almost sure from something I heard him say."

"Oh, what was it?" said Gina, turning pale.

"That true love is never lost ; it has its reward, always, always."

"That is just like him, but then what about that other one's love?" and Gina shook her head.

"You must believe in him. I shall try and say something to him. At least, I think I shall, and if I do not, when you see him tell him what I have told you, and how true I think it is that 'True love is never lost.' There is always some way to show one's own self-sacrifice, and self-sacrifice brings its own reward. I think duty is a higher virtue than love ; and self-sacrifice better and higher than both. We don't know what true love means—we don't understand it. I read the other day something that comforted me. 'You only love truly when you expect nothing back.'"

"Then I shall never love truly," and Gina laughed,

and for a moment all the grace and the beauty of the fairy were restored to her.

"Good-bye," said Claudea, rising. "I only came for a moment. To-morrow you will not see me, as I am going to the island. That will take all the afternoon, but I will come the day after and see if you are not happier. I am sure you will be. Good-bye. Will you kiss me?"

Claudea stooped a little. She was taller, and so much more truly beautiful than Gina, but Gina was like a child that could be gathered up in one's arms. She raised herself on tiptoe and kissed her friend.

"Good-bye, dear Claudea. You are a perfect comforter—quite perfect."





CHAPTER XIX.

THE TASK SET.

“ My heart more blest than heart can tell,
Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe,
That seems to draw—but it shall not be so :
Let all be well, be well.”

 LAUDEA ! Claudea ! You are never going this rough day, are you ? It is too late to catch the tide,” said Mrs. Dewis, standing at the porch door of the “ Mermaid. “ When he went out an hour ago, Mr. Ravenscroft asked me when he could see you. There’s something he wanted to say.”

“ Tell him I’ll be back this evening, mother. I haven’t been to the island for so long ; I must go, you know. The longing has come ; and, besides, I promised Mrs. Price I’d go and cheer up poor Teilo. She says he sits and broods. He can’t get over being a cripple, and, indeed, it is a sore trial for him. He can’t look up.”

“ Perhaps Silvester will be coming over, and you might go back with him and stay the night,” said Mrs. Dewis, thinking more of the weather than of Teilo.

"I shall have Dumb Davy, mother. It's only fresh, and I shall like the toss. I shan't be long." She opened the gate and began walking away ; suddenly she stopped and came back to her mother :

"Mother, if—if I ask father for my wedding present soon, you'll take my side, won't you ?" She just put her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her, for they were alone at this moment.

"Bless me ! Is it that, Claudea ? but who is it ? Well, you always had your own way, and I doubt if father will stand out against your whims ; but there, make haste, child. Let Silvy come back with you if it's inclined to storm. There's a copper colour in the sky I don't like."

Claudea ran down the road and down the hill into the churchyard, and crept into the old grey church for a minute. She felt at home here, and as she knelt down a minute to pray, a prayer without words, she reviewed the past week as one turns back the pages of a picture-book. She had met Herbert alone several times, and he had always been so kind, so full of thought for her ; but she knew that the shadow of the old love was there, and she knew, too, that he was too high-minded to tell her so. She had found many excuses, so as to make their meetings few and short ; but when she was with him, she was very still, and she could really smile even when he spoke of love. She did not want to trouble him with her sorrow ; she wanted him to be happy ; she loved him so truly that it did not occur to her to be sorry as much for herself

as for him. She had but one way, but one way to free him entirely, perfectly, and for always, only one way, and that she must take at once, before Miss Ashton went away, and before those two were again parted. She wanted to give them both this happiness—the man she loved and the friend who had been very kind to her ; neither of them were to blame now. She knew that from the first ; she and Herbert had made the mistake, both of them. He would have got tired of her, perhaps ; and yet, and yet—or if not that, he might have become tired of her island home, and might have wished to go back to the great busy world which he was accustomed to live in. In the first flush of her love she had fancied it would all be beautiful and right, that he would live with her in the dear island ; but now her eyes were opened, and she saw the plain, naked facts. Love had been like a deep well. It reflected her own bright image, and the trees, the sky, the passing birds, and all the beautiful things she loved ; but she now recognized that the water might be cold, and that the reflections might be disturbed and might disappear. Then she looked at another picture. She saw love and its beautiful vision put on one side for ever, and duty step into its place. She saw the picture of a man, a good, upright man, full of religious enthusiasm, laid low by the hand of God, and drinking the cup of bitter disappointment. She saw herself giving up her life to him, and making up to him for his life of sorrow, joining with him in works of mercy, and becoming his helpmate.

It was a choice which few could have made, but Claudea had lived her life among the beautiful things of nature, and she had had eyes to see them and a heart to imbibe their teaching. In her simple way she had lived in close communion with things of heaven, and had been allowed to recognize the beauty of self-sacrifice.

She rose from her knees in the old grey church, and gazed once more at the deep carvings in stone, and at all the things she had loved from childhood. That part of her life must go—she must bid farewell to it. She had asked God to let her live her life in the island, and He was going to grant her her wish, not in the way or in the manner she had expected, but in one which involved sacrifice. She clasped her hands very simply, and accepted the task.

She must not linger any more; it was already late, and she must find Dumb Davy. She opened the massive door and walked quickly across the little bridge over the chattering stream, and then with her firm, free step she hurried to Porth Caerog. Her mind was calm now; she no longer struggled; all her soul seemed bathed in light from the feeling that she would be able—she, humble Claudea, would be able to make two persons happy. She would give them this gift freely and from her heart, not grudgingly, but joyfully.

She looked up at the sky, and wondered how long it would keep fine. There were copper-coloured clouds in the west, and the wind was fresh. Far

out to sea she noticed the white horses cantering towards the land ; she could see sudden gleams of autumn sunlight, succeeded by deep shadows that cast a gloom over the whole landscape, and then again gave place to sunlight. "If the wind keeps up in this quarter it will be all right," she thought, "and it will take us in very quickly." She hastened on still more, and when she neared the cottage she shaded her eyes with her hand, looking about for Davy. He was nowhere visible ; and Claudea feared he was away, until suddenly he ran out of the cottage door to meet her.

"Davy, make haste ; I want to go over at once. It is rather late, and we shall only just have time," she signed to him.

Davy shook his head and pointed to the copper-coloured clouds.

"There'll be a storm by-and-by," he implied.

"But see, the wind is in the right quarter ; we can get there and back before it changes ; besides the 'Sea-gull' will weather that. You're not afraid ?"

Davy laughed and threw his cap up into the air with one hand as he ran down the cliff path to get out the boat. Claudea followed, and between them the "Sea-gull" was soon balancing itself on the water as if she were literally a pinioned bird struggling to fly away. Claudea raised her hand, and Davy shoved off laughing for glee as the little craft crested the big waves and obeyed the imperious command of the swelling sail Claudea kept her watchful eyes on

it, however; for every now and then there came a strange lull in the wind, as if some sullen spirit were tired of obeying a standing order to blow, and were wilfully turning its back on its set task. The sail flapped listlessly and lugubriously against the mast till suddenly it was again filled, causing the "Sea-gull" to fly onward. All this time there seemed to be a beautiful golden light in Claudea's mental vision. She seemed lifted up above all earthly wishes into a region of exquisite calm. Earthly longings were lulled to sleep, and only a still small voice repeated, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee."

They had neared the Whelps, and Davy asked which channel the "Sea-gull" should follow. There was always a danger of being driven on the sharp rocks if a sudden gust came on, but to-day Claudea forgot prudence in her keen enjoyment of movement. She signed to Davy to round the Whelps instead of keeping to leeward of them, and with the nicety of a bird on the wing the boat skimmed close by, leaving barely a few inches between her and destruction; then, as if proud of her exploit, she gently backed into the little port, dropping her sail as if courting admiration and praise for what she had done. Davy jumped out and secured the boat, smiling at her cleverness and stroking her side as if she had been a living creature.

"Wait here, Davy; I shall not be more than an hour, and then we must start at once. We shall have a difficulty to get through that cross current."

Again Davy laughed. He had no fears, though he

would not for the world have taken a stranger back to the mainland to-day. The copper-coloured clouds were spreading slowly, very slowly, and home-coming gulls were flying deliberately back to the island in a thoughtful manner, whilst the puffins ranged themselves in rows on the rocky ledges. Close by, the stormy petrels were skimming the water, fighting and quarrelling and making their wild cat-like sounds as they pecked at each other. Now and then they let the waves float them on their crests, but more often they darted across the wavelets and dived through the swelling waters.

With one parting smile at Dumb Davy, Claudea, instead of going at once to the farm, turned on her left hand, and climbing some rocks made her way across a green meadow to the foot of the hill where Thordis presided. Then plunging into the deep heather the girl struggled against the wind till once again she was at the foot of Thordis. She sat down and nestled close beside her, as she had done in her childhood, when life and happiness seemed boundless, and when every heather twig and every grey stone spoke of joy in some form or other to her happy mind.

“Thordis, Thordis,” she said, speaking softly aloud from long habit, “you will not think me wrong. He is so good, so kind; he does not know what will be for his true happiness, but I do. I should be only a difficulty to him, and she—that fairy you saw, Thordis—she wants this sort of happiness to teach her other

joys. She wants to be led upwards through a path bordered by flowers. They must be very happy together, and they will love me always; whilst perhaps, if I took that gift, it would fade like a spring flower in my hand, and I should grieve. Oh, Thordis, I want to give and give, and you will always stay here, and you will know I thought a long, long time, and at last decided this was the only way. I am not crying, Thordis, I am glad; and all my mind seems clear and bright, and I do it willingly and joyfully. I don't want anyone to be sorry for me. It is better to give than to receive, and all my life I have received so much. All this beautiful place, and all my birds, and the dear creatures here, they have all given to me, to me, Thordis, and now I shall do as they have done, and give to others what will make those two happy. You understand, don't you, Thordis? You will say I am right—you with your dear face full of courage and steadfastness. I will be firm and courageous too, Thordis. You will always help me, and—yes, I see you are pleased."

Claudea rose to her feet and reached her arms up to put them round the neck of Thordis, and she laid her cheek against the old figure-head, finding the comfort she had always found, and smiling even as a few tears fell slowly on the great calm bosom of Thordis. There was another sudden lull, and the stillness seemed strangely comforting to the lonely girl, like the stillness of victory after struggle, or like the waking up in a new land of joy.

At last she remembered she had but very little time in which to accomplish her mission. With one more kiss, warm and passionate, as is the kiss of a little child on the cheek of its favourite doll, Claudea stepped down. She was so free here to do what she liked. No human being was in sight ; there were only the circling gulls uttering their weird cries and the startled rabbits scampering away from their burrows. A little yellowhammer hopped in front of her, and a robin fluttered into a fresh-water pool in the rocks close beside her. Claudea was at peace now with all the world, and she could understand these winged messages from heaven.

Without again stopping she ran on down the hill, plunging nearly waist-deep in heather, till she reached the bottom of the hill, and took the field-path to the farm. Where was Teilo ? Would he be sitting on the old rock looking towards the mainland ? or would he have found it too cold and blustering ? She could not see him, approaching from this side, for the farm was in a hollow and was not visible till one was close by. The cows were grazing in this meadow and lifted their heads as she passed. A cart-horse came up to her to receive a pat on his old mane, now turning grey. Then she tore herself away from all these old favourites, and ran down some steep steps into the farm garden. The autumn flowers were blowing luxuriantly. The Michaelmas daisies were bending with the weight of their mauve heads, and three tall sunflowers stared open-eyed at her as she brushed

against their giant leaves. The door as usual was open, and the deceptive gleam darted in to settle upon the old woodwork and to caress the red tiles of the floor.

"Betty! Betty!" called out Claudea; "is Mr. Teilo indoors?"

Betty came running out.

"Lor-a-mercy, Miss Claudea! how did you come? I never heard you up the steps."

"I have been up the hill. There is not much time to spare. Where is Silvester?"

"Master Silvy's gone over in his boat this afternoon to the lighthouse. The men there sent for potatoes. They say there is rough weather coming. You had best go home soon, Miss Claudea, or sleep here. Mr. Teilo is out in his old place; leastways I think so, but I was washing in the back kitchen and didn't notice. He was indoors all morning studying his Bible. I think if he read the Bible less and smiled a bit more he would please the Almighty a deal better. But there! them Methodies don't go to heaven the same ways as we do."

"There is more than one road to heaven, Betty, I expect, or many of us would be left out. There, I'm going to pick some of these big daisies for Blackstar's grave. She was always fond of eating them when one wasn't watching her."

"You do look bonny to-day, my dear. When shall we hear of picking flowers to strew on your wedding-path?"

"When?—when? Well, soon, I expect, and you will have to make the old farm very smart."

"Bless the child! but don't you linger long, Miss Claudea; if you want to see Mr. Teilo, you'd best go at once."

Claudea picked a nosegay, and went round by Blackstar's grave before she rounded the building and climbed up to the rocky path which looked seaward. She seemed to wish to put off seeing Teilo as long as possible, but at last she knew she had only just time to say what she had come to say; so very slowly she climbed the path.

"I am quite happy," she said to herself. "I will not give my gift grudgingly, and I shall see the smile on Teilo's poor sad face."

She turned the corner and saw him sitting in his old accustomed place, with his head bowed upon his hands, and his eyes looking sadly landward. He might have sat as a model to Michael Angelo for some mighty figure of despair, and the utter simplicity of the pose would have added strength to the pathos of it. Claudea's heart sank low as she beheld him; then suddenly rebounded, and all her own sorrows fled from her mind. God had sent her on this mission, and she said in her heart that she was ready to accept it.

"Teilo!" she called softly; and he lifted his head and saw her standing there before him in all her radiant beauty.

For a moment he gazed at her without speaking;

then the very sight of her seemed to bring back a pale shade of colour to his cheeks, and he reached his hand out to find his crutches.

“Don’t get up, dear Teilo. I have come to see you. I have not very long to stay. The sky looks rather as if we should have some squalls presently ; so I must hurry back, but will you let me sit near you and tell you something ?”

Teilo knew what it was. She had come to tell him of her marriage. As well hear it at once and put himself out of his pain.

“Yes,” he said, “I know, I know ; but let me hear it ;” and he motioned her to sit down beside him.





CHAPTER XX.

UNWORTHY.

“Love that can shape or can shatter a life till the life shall have fled ?

Nay, let us welcome him, Love that can lift up a life from the dead.

Keep him away from the lone little isle. Let us be, let us be.

Nay, let him make it his own, let him reign in it—he, it is he, Love that is born of the deep coming up with the sun from the sea.”

DO you remember, Teilo, that a little while ago you said you would not wait for my answer till Christmas Eve, but that you gave me my freedom ? I know what you thought—but——” Claudea paused. There came a sudden gust of wind which blew her curly hair hither and thither, so that she stooped a little to find shelter behind the great grey rock.

“You know ?” asked Teilo, gazing at her with his sunken eyes as if he were trying to gather his ideas together.

“Yes ; I know something of it. You and Morgan had a quarrel out there on the cliff. Do you remember that first quarrel, and oh ! it was about me. I have often felt sad about it, but indeed——”

"It was not that—not that," he said, shaking his head. "You know nothing about it, Claudea."

"But do you know that when I found you, dear Teilo, there was no one at hand—no one to help us; so I sent Dumb Davy to fetch the Norris lads, and I stayed with you."

"Did you do that?" he asked, looking down gloomily; "I wish you had left me alone."

'Yes, I did that. I stayed by you, and I put your head on my knee, and my heart was very, very sore for you. Then the tide came up nearer and nearer to us, and I watched it, fancying it would reach us; and when at last it came quite near to you I tried to drag you away a little, but I could only move you a few inches, and when I had done that I saw Morgan's cap lying under you."

Teilo stretched out his hand as if to put away a terrible picture from his mental vision.

"You saw it?—you saw it?—what did you do?"

"I got up, and taking it with me I buried it deep down between some rocks, and I placed some stones on it; and now only the sea can give up that secret. Tell me, Teilo, did I do right, or has Morgan injured you too deeply for forgiveness? Don't you know that seventy times seven is the number that Christ gives us?"

"Thank you, Claudea; you did right. But memory cannot as easily be hidden away underground. Nay, it is always spreading itself out like a map at one's feet. The living picture glows like coals of fire. Give me your hand."

She held out her small brown hand and placed it in his, which was burning hot.

“Poor Teilo!” she said softly.

“Do you know that I was the murderer? When Morgan spoke to me then, that old madness rose again, and I thought that such a man was unworthy to live; so I seized him, and then and there we struggled together—I did not care if I killed him. I saw him go step by step, back and back closer to the cliff, and then all at once I knew that he was the stronger man, and I felt myself hurled into space. Do you know, Claudea, even at that moment I seemed to be listening to one of my own sermons on Hell, and I seemed to feel that I was going there myself, down—down—deep down.”

“Don’t speak like that, dear Teilo.”

“I have been there ever since. When I woke up I was there. When you came to see me I was there. I shall always be there now till I die, and then——”

“Don’t—don’t say all this, please don’t. You are ill. Even if it was so then, I am sure it is not so now. In this dear place—in my island—haven’t you heard the Christ speaking here—haven’t you, Teilo? ‘Come unto Me,’ He says.”

“No, I haven’t heard it. Those words are not for me. All my life has been a sham; I have preached to others, and I am now a castaway. I can’t find any love or any pity in my heart. I can’t be glad for your joy even, the joy that shines in your face, Claudea.”

"Tell me more—tell me what Morgan said to you. You know he went away at once. He did not stop to see if he had killed you. You need not think you were his murderer, when you so nearly died."

"Morgan was going anyhow—and this I will tell you, Claudea, he was going to lure Sezerina away from her home. She had promised to go with him, but I found it out. Do you think that that was not enough to raise the devil in me?"

"I was afraid of that. Poor Rina! but she must be sorry now for her foolish thought. She looks sad; indeed you must forgive her—you must."

Teilo raised his head and looked searchingly at the beautiful face before him. It appeared to him as if Claudea could only reflect Heaven. There was a new expression on her countenance—a new love shining from her eyes. It was, of course, he thought, because of this new love in her life.

"There is some forgiveness which you cannot bring yourself to give. Sezerina must suffer like others. She must suffer as I do."

"You don't understand suffering if you want others to share it. Oh, Teilo! I want those I love to be happy. I want to give them what my pain has gained for them if that will help them; I have learnt that lesson now, but one can only learn it through suffering, only through suffering."

"Why do *you* talk of suffering?"

"Because we all have to learn it some time or other; you know that. But I came here to ask you

something. I must not stay very long, as Dumb Davy is waiting for me, and I think the storm is coming up."

"You want me to wish you joy?" he said slowly.

"Yes; you cannot wish me anything else."

"I think not, I think not." Her gentle words fell like dew on parched land; the hard crust was gradually giving way under this sweet sunshine.

"I want you to let me stay and comfort you, Teilo, on this island—my island, you know. Once you thought that you could not stay here; you thought that you heard God calling you to go further away, but now, now, Teilo, you will find there is much one can learn here. You can learn to love all God's creatures first, and then, and then—"

"What do you mean?" said the sick man, his voice trembling a little. "I don't want anyone's comfort, not even yours."

"Oh, yes, you do. You want mine, Teilo. In the old days you were not sure if you wanted it, but now I must make up for all you have lost. I am come here to tell you that; don't you believe it, don't you understand?"

She knelt down by him, and took his thin burning hand in hers with the action of a mother who wishes to protect her child.

"I can walk for you; I can go on your errands to the poor people; you know how strong I am. You shall be the head, I shall be the limbs that obey, and the poor will bless your name as they have done

many times before. Teilo, the call has come now to you and to me—to us both together. Let us follow, yes, together. I have done so to-day, and I have come to you, dear Teilo."

"You have come back to me. No, no." He loosed her hand, and half motioned her away. He would have risen and gone from her if he could have done so easily, but his crutches were not close beside him, and he hated to show her how helpless he was.

"Don't go away, don't leave me, Teilo. I have come back to the island, and I mean to live here all the rest of my life. Don't despise my help."

"Your help! Yours, Claudea? Oh, no, not now, not now. You love another—and now I am a poor helpless cripple, not fit for such as you. No, no, go away, Claudea; leave me."

"Don't you love me any more, Teilo?"

"Love you? I have prayed to hate you, but I can't help it, I love you still, only now—now—darling, look what I am! No, no, that other one must have you. Leave me."

"But I told you God's call has come to you and to me. If you love me still, Teilo, I will be your faithful wife till death parts us—I will be your helpmeet, and we shall live here, here always."

A low howl of the wind carried her words to Teilo, and beyond him to where Thordis stood fronting the sea, and to where the great precipitous rocks dipped their feet into the waters and raised their heads to heaven. On the horizon the copper-coloured clouds

stretched out lurid red arms into the grey heaven, and sent their windy messenger to precede them. Even the great rock seemed barely to shelter these two from this sudden blast, which, however, passed away as quickly as it came. Teilo bowed his head, and after the blast he seemed to hear the still small voice of God's infinite mercy and forgiveness, but the voice was the voice of Claudea. He held out his hand again, much as a child might do, a child who has found a guide to lead it out of a dark wood.

She took it between both of hers, and for a few minutes they remained thus in silence. There was nothing passionate in the action; there could be none on her side, and for him passion seemed to have been all burnt out in a fierce furnace. A great peace fell upon them, and it seemed to reproduce the sudden calm of nature, of that peace which succeeded storm—a peace which some weary hearts think rivals passionate joy. All at once another blast of wind came out of the copper sky. It could almost be seen approaching, whilst the sullen roar was heard as it swept on towards the island.

Claudea and Teilo drew closer to the sheltering rock, and listened in silence as the wind-storm swept over them. When it had gone by, she rose quickly.

“Teilo,” she said, “the wind is too strong for you to remain here; come in doors. Let me help you.” She stooped to pick up his crutches and assisted him to rise. All her womanly pity came to help her great sacrifice as she noticed how slowly the once strong,

handsome man dragged himself up, and with what difficulty he moved along the uneven ground.

It took them several minutes to reach the farm door, and here she paused.

"Good-bye, Teilo; I must hurry home now. Dumb Davy is waiting for me, and mother will be expecting me home. If you will let me, I shall tell her and father this evening, and I shall ask him for—my island—our island in future, Teilo."

Teilo sank down on the seat inside the porch, weary with even this exertion, and once again he looked at Claudea standing beside him in all her perfect beauty. Was it true that she was his, giving herself to him freely, and of her own accord—to him? The wish of his heart was answered, and yet, instead of a great feeling of joy and pride, he felt humbled before God. He asked himself now, for the first time in his life, was he worthy of this priceless gift? He, Teilo Price, who had been a murderer in his heart, who had encouraged the feeling of hatred till it had overmastered him. He, who had called himself a preacher to lost souls, who had believed in his own mission and in a call from God, but who was himself worse than the least worthy of his flock, was he worthy of her?

"Good-bye, dear, dear Claudea," he answered, and she heard a long weary sigh. "Good-bye. You must tell me what to do in the future. As for myself, I am not worthy of such devotion—but God gives us more than we deserve. Claudea, stoop down, my dearest,

Let me tell you again how unworthy I am. You have put a new heart in me; God has not forsaken me entirely if He gives you to me. I will arise and go to my Father——”

At this moment there was heard a loosening of pebbles and the sound of hurried footsteps. Claudea, who had knelt down beside the sick man, rose slowly. She was not ashamed of her action. The golden light of self-renunciation still surrounded her, and her great pity for Teilo had made the sacrifice possible. It was, however, only Dumb Davy, whose head appeared suddenly from the steps below, and who with a strange, weird gesture ran up to his mistress.

“Are you coming, Miss Claudea? You must make haste. Look yonder?” His long, thin arms were stretched seaward towards the lurid sky, and his large eyes expressed anxiety. Claudea quickly motioned him to be quiet. Teilo must not be aware of the boy’s fears. She herself had none, but she knew she must get back to her mother and father, in order to get their consent to her marriage with Teilo. They must give it. Her father had never refused her anything, never. She knew he would not welcome this poor cripple; he would say he was no fit husband for his Claudea; but she, Claudea, must make him see the necessity; she must make him share the joy of her self-sacrifice without letting him know that it was one, and how would he be able to resist his Claudea’s entreaties when her arms were round his neck? He could not. But above all, she must let

Herbert knew that everything but true friendship was over between them, and she must make him promise to see his old love and to give her hope for the future, the near future. The task was difficult, very difficult; but she would do it. She must not let Herbert grieve about it. She would tell him the old promise had drawn her back to Teilo, now that he wanted help. Everyone could see that Teilo, the cripple, wanted her far more than the Teilo who had a call to save souls. Besides, now she was strong for this last battle; for she was bound to Teilo for ever, bound by this short half-hour's words, and by all the strength of the spirit of duty. There was nothing more to say. She knew that by this one act of hers Herbert was free, free for ever, and free from all regret or shame. He should never know all—never.

"Dear Teilo," she said softly, even though Dumb Davy could not hear, "good-bye now. I am going home—but I like to know that it is my island that has done you good, and my island that has taught you that God is Love."

He would have kissed her hand if Dumb Davy had not been standing there close by. As it was he pressed it with all the power that his poor, thin fingers still retained, and for the first time since the night of that terrible accident he smiled, and with that smile Teilo's good angel returned.

It seemed suddenly as if the sunshine were gone when the next instant Claudea disappeared. Where was it? Surely just now it had played upon the old

woodwork and on the red flags. Had Claudea taken it all away with her? He looked up and noticed that the sky above was overcast with dull clouds edged with lurid light, and that occasionally, and at shorter intervals, came the same blasts of strange wind, the same that had passed over himself and Claudea. He felt cold and shivered a little; then he took up his crutches, and standing up he opened the door and entered the parlour, darkened by its low thick beams and its old-fashioned windows. But now everything looked different—everything was tinged with golden colours. This was to be their home; here he should see that sweet presence, and he should hear the music of her voice about the house, and all the animate and inanimate things in Claudea's island would say "God is Love."

"Mr. Teilo," said Betty, hurrying in. "You are indoors; I am glad. But where is Miss Claudea? She is here still, isn't she?"

"No, Betty, she's gone home!"

"Good Lord! and there's a fearful storm upon us!"

"Oh, Betty, there's no danger for Miss Claudea; none whatever," he said quickly.

"Miss Claudea is as sure as most people, that's true; but, good Lord! look at those heavy drops. It's the strangest sky that ever I saw. It's not a natural storm. But there, she's got Dumb Davy, and he's worth two men any day, if there's danger. He's no fears."

"No more has Claudea, but I think I'll go out and watch the boat a little while, Betty."

"No, Mr. Teilo, don't you go. You being so crippled like, you'd find it a hard job to get home quickly, if so be the storm burst upon you."

An hour ago Teilo would have resented this reminder of his helpless condition, now he only smiled.

"Betty, when Christ was on earth He healed the blind and made the lame man to walk."

"Yes, Mr. Teilo, and it's a sore pity you hadn't 'a lived in those times. There's none to do it now, that's sure and certain."

"You're wrong, Betty, quite wrong. Christ has been here, and He has opened the eyes of the blind, and made the lame man to walk."

Betty gave a quick glance at the crutches, and at Teilo's shortened leg. Then she shook her head ; she could see no miracle performed in that direction, and the only comfort she could find was this :

"Leastways you're not so blind as I am, Mr. Teilo, for I'm a getting worse every day. But, Lord, what's up now !"

There was a sound of footsteps and of two excited voices, as a man burst open the door, calling out to Betty, "Come, come along with us—*Make haste.*"





CHAPTER XXI.

AT HOME.

“ For sullen-seeming Death may give
More life to Love than is or ever was
In our low world, where yet 'tis sweet to live.”

DUMB DAVY ran on quickly in front of his mistress to where the “Sea-gull,” chained to shore, was tugging at its bonds as if anxious to fly home. The green water that boiled into white foam close to the rocks a little way from shore, was upheaved by a ground swell, but appeared unable to form itself into waves except at irregular intervals. The copper sky had spread high above the horizon, and looked down angrily upon the sea.

As the two entered the boat there was a dead silence in the air, a deadness over everything but the near breakers. Davy looked up with a puzzled expression in his eyes for nothing seemed as usual, then he hastily unfastened the chain and seized the oars.

“ Let us get clear of the Whelps, Davy, and then we will try and put up the sail. If the wind rises a little we can run on quickly. How is the tide ? ” said Claudea.

“ We shall have a bad time in the current,” signed

Davy, nodding in the direction of the channel, and giving a long stroke of the oar. His mistress did the same, for once off from shore they seemed surrounded by a great upheaving of unformed waves and a stifling atmosphere. They had gone outside the rocks for fear of one of the sudden gusts lately experienced, which gusts, being an uncertain quantity, could not very accurately be prepared for. The two knew all these uncertainties too well to run the danger of taking the shorter cut from within the rocky bay, so they bravely pulled out in order to head the treacherous rocky teeth of the Whelps. Still the calm continued, and the sky grew darker and more sullen-looking. The strange oppression increased, and the gulls sank slowly towards the water, as if beaten down by some invisible weight in the air above them. A few razor-bills flew swiftly past the boat, hastening landwards, their red bills making a thin line of colour above the grey-green waves. A long floating mass of seaweed, like a wriggling serpent, floated past the "Sea-gull," for a moment entangling itself in the keel, then swept on by the force of the swell. Still the two rowed bravely on, till, having nearly rounded the Whelps, they entered the strong swift current which had always to be faced in this passage to and from the mainland.

"Shall I put up the sail?" signed Davy, resting on his oar.

"There is no wind, Davy. Of what use will be the sail? We must fight bravely on."

"But it is coming," Davy implied by stooping his head and by stretching out his hand, as if he felt the far-off sound.

All at once Claudea looked forth and beheld a strange and awful sight—a sight which she had never seen before, and which so fascinated her that she was struck dumb for a few seconds. The copper-coloured cloud seemed suddenly to gather itself into a focus, as if four unseen winds propelled it to a centre. Then out of the dark mass suddenly there shot forth a black tongue, darting towards the sea like a serpent attacking its prey. The water beneath appeared to repeat the action with a similar, but upward motion, and thus to link itself with its strange adversary. Then followed a long low howl of wind from behind this awful column, a blast which swept it onward with relentless power. Claudea had then only time to shout to Davy, forgetting he could not hear:

"Davy, Davy, cling to the boat! Leave the oars. It is coming. Oh, God!"

But Dumb Davy had also seen it. He dropped the oars, and with a face distorted with horror he flung himself at Claudea's feet and clung to her skirts. At that moment, when the awful destroying monster was close upon them, suddenly Claudea felt lifted out of all the momentary fear which had almost paralyzed her. It was like a flash from God's glory, like a grasp from His hand, and a whisper from His still small voice, which can be heard above all storms "Be not afraid. It is I."

That bright vision was all she remembered of the shock, whilst the little boat was swept a few yards against the current, crushed as if it had been made of feeble twigs, and then ruthlessly flung upon the edged teeth of the Whelps, round which the waves after a few seconds boiled and hissed as if they were a bed of venomous snakes, or as if some pent-up springs were just then released from an underground cavern.

Then there was a great calm, whilst the monster was swept on by the wind to dissolve suddenly eastward of the many islands.

It might have been five minutes more or less—time was not counted—when Claudea woke again to consciousness. She was lying on the slope of a ledge of the cruel reef. Right away on the left there was a clear space of blue sky and crossing it a long ray of the sun stretched toward the zenith.

The first moment she saw this peaceful sight Claudea smiled, and the words came back again to her ears, as if someone close beside repeated them: "Be not afraid. It is I."

Was it over? She had not been afraid at all. Then she thought of Davy.

"Davy, Davy!" she called, and tried to rise. Her left arm was powerless; but she felt no pain. One foot, too, was numb and heavy. She must have been bruised, but it was Davy who mattered. Where was the dear lad?

"Davy!" Then looking all around she saw a still form on a lower ledge beneath her. The water was

splashing over part of it, and must in a few minutes wash him away from his insecure resting-place.

"Davy, Davy!" she called earnestly, though he could not hear her. She must reach him—she must.

With great difficulty and regardless of pain, so that she felt but little of it, she dragged herself down, using all the strength that remained to her. Her right hand and arm still retained their old power, and when she had literally crawled down over the slippery rocks, she smiled to see she could almost touch him. She had now, however, reached the dangerous slippery ledge, so she must act very cautiously.

Now she could take hold of his shoulder.

She shook him as much as she could, and a sudden joy entered her heart when he moved. Again she tried to rouse him, and then he opened his eyes, but he looked at her without seeming to recognize her.

She made signs to him, and a dim look as one who wakes after a long sleep passed over his features.

"Get up," she signed to him. "Get up higher, Davy."

He seemed to try to obey her, evidently from mere force of habit, without however appearing to know who it was who commanded him to rise. He stretched out his long thin arm, and struggled to catch at something higher than himself. Just then a swelling wave lapped itself over him, and he appeared to wake up still further. The rock he clutched was slippery with black, clinging seaweed, and the water was sucking him back. He flung his other hand towards Claudea; he could not quite reach her, as she

had prudently crept back a little higher, but seeing him slipping—slipping down again—she made a great effort, and stooping down as far as possible, she held out to him a saving hand. With a dull cry of delight the lad clutched her with the clutch of a drowning person, and by so doing he hoisted himself up a few inches higher; then, suddenly loosening her hand, grasped another point of rock, and was saved. But for her the impetus downward had been too powerful. Claudea felt herself slipping off the insecure ledge into the cold water. Had her left arm been of any use, she could easily have saved herself. For one moment her right hand seized a shining surface, but her own weight was too great; for just then a swelling wave appeared to leap up towards her and to lift her bodily down, and almost gently to set her floating upon the bosom of the great ocean. She tried to strike out with one hand and found it impossible; then she resigned herself to the cradling sea, and as she floated away she saw that Dumb Davy had crawled still higher up, quite out of the reach of the next waves. She had saved him—poor, faithful, brave-hearted Davy—but would help come for her? Would she be washed back upon the Whelps? She wanted to live. The golden haze was still around her. She wanted to see Herbert and his bride happy with the happiness she had given them, her gift. Then suddenly she felt herself heaved into the strong current, and it was running in towards land. The hour had come, and she was buffeted by the cruel waves, and

sent back and back towards her island. Her strength was gone—she sank, and when she rose again it was to hear a distant sound from the shore—then to see another golden haze—then peace and oblivion.

* * * * *

Dumb Davy only returned to full consciousness when he felt himself once more upon the sea. He saw that he was in a boat, and he was going to the island without rounding the Whelps. Two men were pulling him in, which strange fact served to bring him fully to himself. Then he noticed that at the end of the boat his mistress was lying flat down with closed eyes and one hand lying on her bosom. Her hair was uncoiled and spread itself out all about her beautiful head. He tried to start up in order to wake her, but then one of the men held him down. He felt sore and bruised still—but the pain was nothing to the cold numb feeling in his brain when he looked at Claudea. Was she asleep? Or—or— Then he tried to recollect what had happened, and the effort resulted in a strange blank of memory.

Two minutes more, and the boat ran in between the rocks, right up to the little sandy shore where Claudea used to pick up tiny shells when she was a small child. Betty was standing there wringing her hands, in the midst of a few men from the farm, and foremost of all stood Teilo leaning on his crutches. He was mute with the anguish of uncertainty, whilst Betty's tongue and her tears ran on from the same reason. She spoke first, as the keel grated on the shore :

"Now, Dan, quick! make haste! tell us if she's fainted. The lad's safe enough, I see. My poor child—my poor nursling—she's only fainted. Now you others lift Dumb Davy out. He's not able to move. Good Lord! and you saw it? You saw her save him?"

"The 'Sea-gull' was broken up like matchwood. It's the Whelps as saved the bodies. Ay, we saw her rescue him; but it was all so quick, though we went as fast as possible."

"Don't waste words—quick! take her up! let everything be done—she's only fainted. Run on, and clear the way—lift her gently." Thus spoke Teilo, who, forgetting his own infirmities, directed everything that was to be done, as for one moment he seized the small brown hand that hung heavily down by her side.

Claudea had come back to her island home, and there the men who had always known her and loved her lifted her up gently, and as full of awe as if she had been a princess born.

They laid her on the great four-poster bed in the farm, whilst Dumb Davy crouched by the kitchen fire below, gazing, with the terrible, wistful gaze of the deaf and dumb, into the fire, for his eyes seemed to pierce through material things, and to see beyond mortal sight.

Teilo found him crouching there an hour afterwards. His own face was very terrible to look upon, but the look was not the one Claudea had found him with,

but one far different—a look that had nothing to do with his own sins and his own soul.

He laid his hand on the boy's head, and turned away his eyes as he made the sign of death.

“Davy, my poor lad, she is at rest, at rest. Do you understand? She loved you dearly. Davy, you shall always live with me.” He remained some moments thus; then he went to his own room, and locked the door.

* * * *

It was Claudea's funeral day, and never had such a strange procession of boats been seen on the water that divided the island from the mainland. It was the miller's boat that went to fetch the coffin and its chief mourners, but many other smaller crafts had been lent for the honour of the dead girl, and the long procession of sails as they rounded the cruel rocks looked like some slow flight of sea-birds. Dumb Davy crouched near the coffin with a sorrow that could not be comforted, for it had no words. No one had been able to get him away. Teilo, too, was there, close to the dumb lad, plunged in a grief that was voiceless and tearless. Here, too, in this boat was Martin Dewis, crying like a child, and every now and then laying his cheek against the cold coffin, not ashamed to show his grief.

“My child, my child, my little Claudea. It's not true you've gone away from me, not true. Just say one word, only one. Teilo, why do you grieve? you had her last words, her last, and I had none. Look,

that was the spot, there yonder, where they found her. She who loved them all, these waters and the rocks and the island—Claudea's island—why has God taken her away from us all?"

Teilo could not answer; he had no words.

Then one of the men who was rowing looked up and pointed upwards. There was a long line of birds on the wing. They were leaving Claudea's island for warmer climes, flying forth, flying no one knew whither.

Then silence fell again, only broken by the father's complaint, and by the splash of the tiny waves against the boat, for the day was perfect, and not a cloud marred the deep blue of the autumn sky.

On the shore a few mourners were waiting.

Herbert was there, and Gina was by his side. Gina knew all now, and these two had guessed what they did not know, for there had been sent to Herbert a little packet done up and directed in Claudea's own handwriting.

It was a book much valued by Claudea, and on the flyleaf was written: "A wedding gift, for Herbert and Gina, from Claudea." She had planned it all, and he knew now what she had done, for Teilo had told him all when Herbert had gone over and spent many hours by the lonely heart-broken man. He knew, and Gina knew, but no one else; they respected her secret, and they accepted the gift, adding to it the undying memory of the love of the noblest woman's heart which either had ever known.

To-day Herbert held a crown of exquisite roses, whilst Gina, with truer woman's instinct, had herself woven a wreath of autumn field-flowers and moss.

"Oh, Herbert! she loved them so much," she sobbed.

"And she has loved us. Gina, we owe her the knowledge of something higher than human love, which neither of us knew before."

"Yes; she has linked us to her own divinity, our dear Claudea."

* * * *

"He that believeth in Me, though he were dead yet shall he live," said Mr. Hathaway, as he gazed at the great throng of all conditions of poor men and women come to do honour to the one they loved. As Teilo listened, a soft peace fell upon him, and a golden haze seemed to surround him, whilst the bitterness of his sorrow fell from him like a heavy cloak loosed from the weary traveller's shoulders. He stretched forth his hand, and silently clasped Sezerina's fingers. Her low sob was the peace-token between them ; he could forgive at last.

"I have been dead, O Lord!" cried Teilo's heart. "I have been dead, but am alive again. Within the narrow circle that Thou hast drawn around me, I will go forth and work for others. She said some day I should hear the call. I have heard it, O Lord ! I have heard it here, here, to-day. Lord help me, and when Thou hearest, Lord, forgive."

As they walked out to the grave, Silvester gave his arm to his mother, and he whispered to her :

"Claudea would bid me be a daughter now, mother. She is not dead. It isn't true. She's only showing us the way."

But when at last they were all gone, Dumb Davy was crouching still by the damp earth, and from his wordless throat there came a low harsh cry like the cry of the sea-gull who has been robbed of her nestlings.

When the darkness drew a veil over the lonely churchyard, a girl came and found him still crouching on the damp grave.

"Davy, Dumb Davy," she said, though he could not hear. "She was *my* friend—she was *my* friend."



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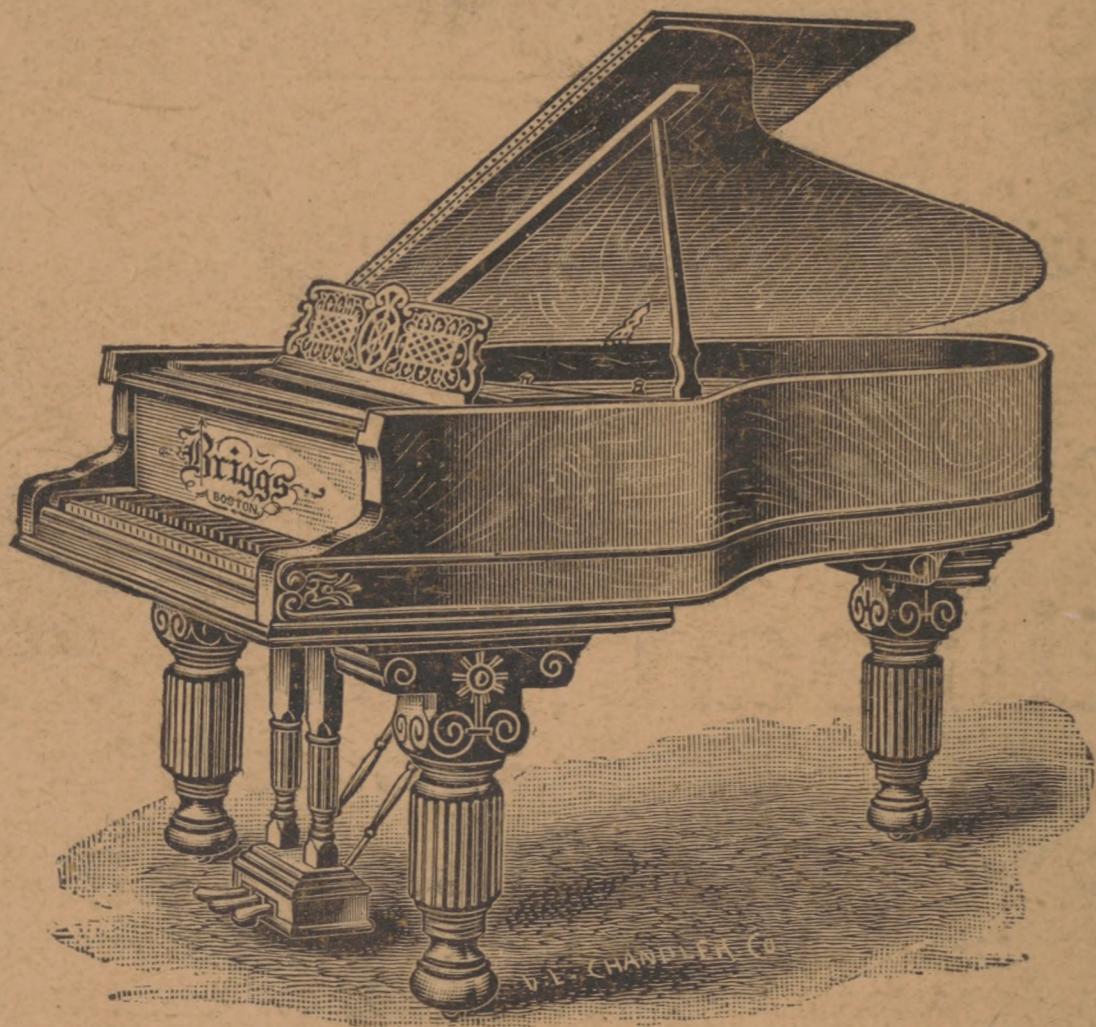
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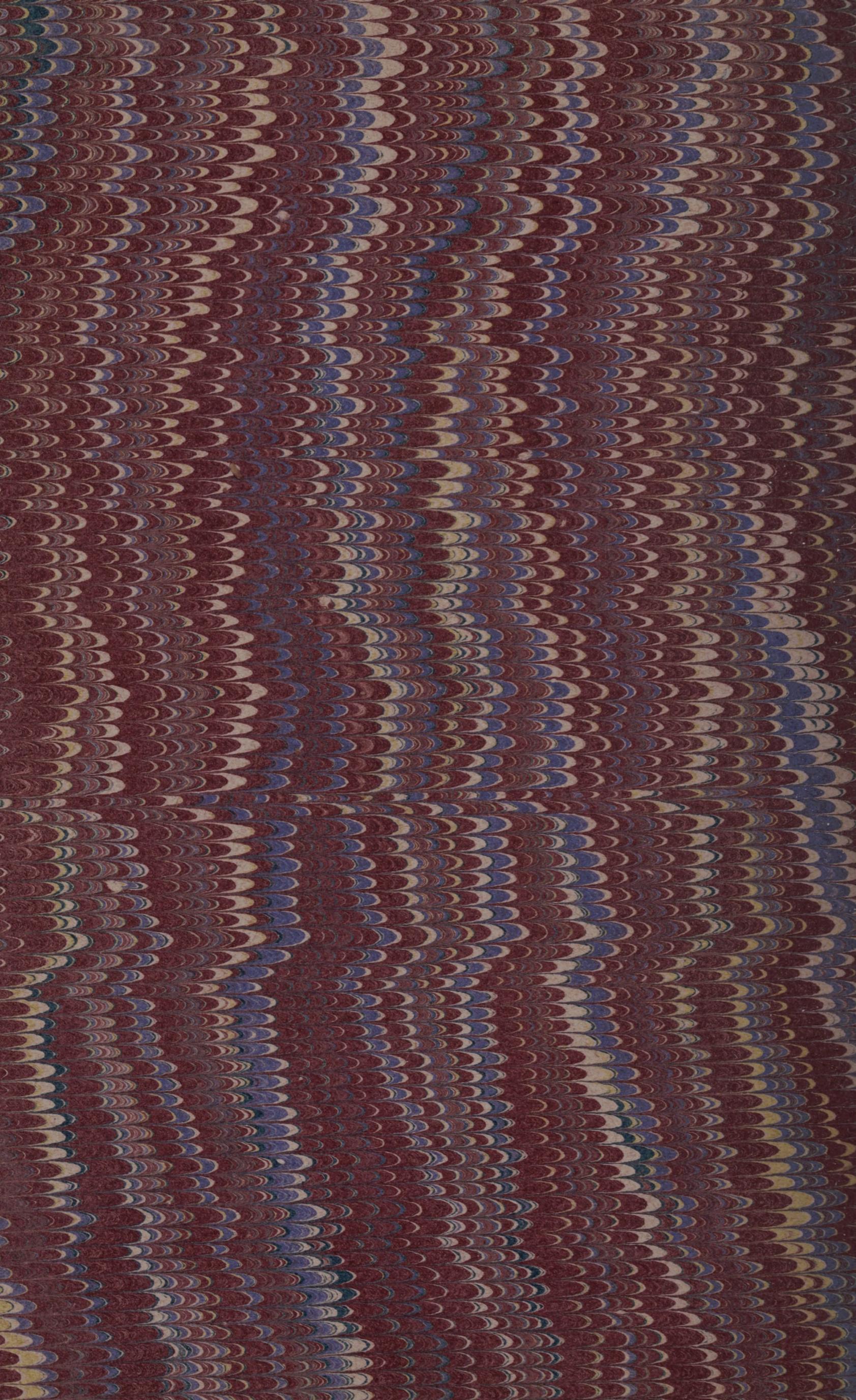
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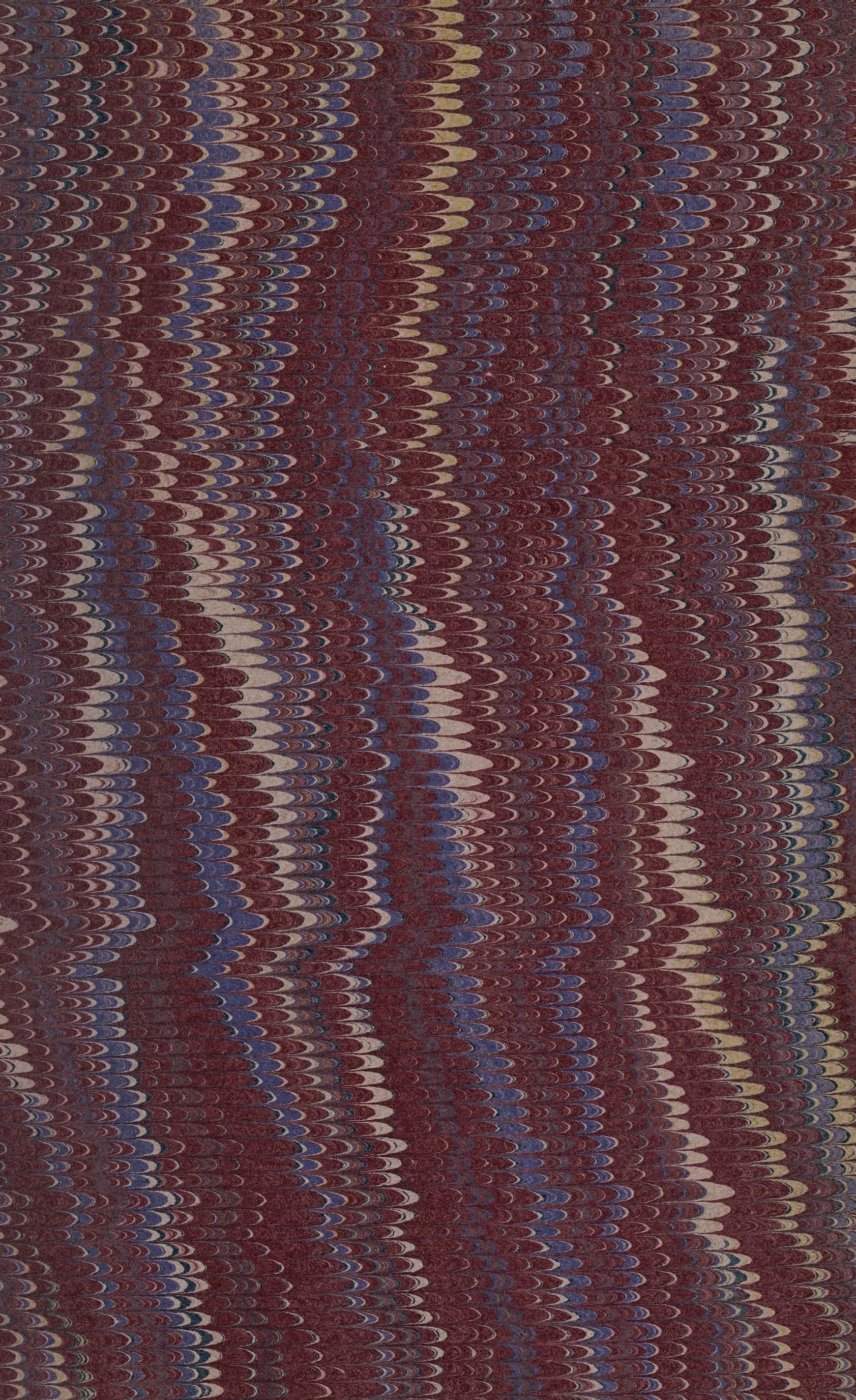
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